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THE WOOING OF SHEILA

GRACE RHYS

THE WOOING OF SHEILA

BY

GRACE RHYS

Author of "Mary Dominic"

NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1901

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Æschylus.

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THE WOOING OF SHEILA

CHAPTER I

THE HALL OF TALLAT

JOHN POWER sat in the hall of his house. It was a wide hall, dark-panelled and sombre, and in the middle of it was a great shining table which six men-servants polished every Saturday.

John Power sat in comfort, smoking a long clay pipe. By him stood a two-handled silver tankard of ale. On the cold hearthstone lay three great hounds, each in his loop.

The heat of the summer day was over, but still the air streamed in warm and scented through the open hall door. From where he sat Power could see a long stretch of new-shaven meadow backed by ascending woods in darkening summer green. He could hear, too, the wheels of the last load of hay retreating homewards to the haggart. All day his men had laboured and he had urged them on, betaking himself at intervals to his cool hall and his pipe and tankard.

A fine old country squire he looked as he sat

there; his face was round and ruddy red, and his hair thick and white as wool. A great spittoon of brass stood near him on the floor. With each draught of ale he cursed into his tankard, for John Power had many enemies, and the thought of them angered his soul.

When the last drop of ale was drunk out, and it was in his mind whether he should call for another, a door at the back opened and his son Michael entered the room.

Michael Power was a man grown; he trode with a heavy foot, like one who has overused his strength, and his weighty shoulders had already a slight stoop. He stood up by the mantel-shelf, leaning his back to the wall.

John Power watched him sideways, a good-humoured smile on his healthy face.

"Hay all in, Michael?" said he.

"They were pitching the last fork as I came away, sir."

"Did you see Mulloy about the lock of rushes for the thatching of the rick to-morrow?"

Michael shifted uneasily from one foot to another, and his father watched him carefully from the corner of his eye. Nature had been kind to Michael: standing there in his light fustian clothes, with the hay-seed in his hair, he was a son most men would have been proud to have bred. His face was sensitive and noble, though now inflamed beneath its bronze by weariness and the heat of the long day; his grey flannel shirt was open at the

neck, showing the lines of his broad throat. His eyes were brown and well opened, and his hair and the down on his upper lip were brown too.

The two men were strangely unlike as well in dress as in countenance: the elder was clad in fine blue cloth and spotless linen, and the hand that fingered the pipe was well-kept; the eye that so closely regarded his son was small and of a cold blue.

Presently Michael spoke:

"I want to go to Gurt to-morrow, father."

"Do ye now?" answered the other.

"I've been working like a blind horse these ten days at the hay," went on Michael. "There isn't a man on the place done half what I have, and I'm the only one to go unpaid. I think ye ought to give me something, father," he said, flushing a still deeper red beneath his sun-brown.

"Do ye now?" said his father.

"Damn!" said Michael, in a sudden fury.

"What's that?" asked his father quickly.

"I can't stand it, father," said Michael, choking. "I must go from the place, and God forgive ye. Ye've been a hard master to me. Ye've had my labour since I was ten years of age, and here I am at five-and-twenty without a penny, without liberty or education, no better than a day-labourer."

John Power kept silence. One of the hounds got up and came over to him, fondly pushing a wet muzzle into his hand. He remained silent so long

that Michael, who was now giddy with passion, turned with clenching fists towards him.

"Wait a bit, me buck!" said Power leisurely. "I said nothing, did I? Take that face off ye, or out ye go. You don't play the wild buffalo in here. You'll thatch that rick to-morrow. I'm not going to have the hay spoiled. And you can go to Gurt or hell if ye like when it's done, and I'll give you ten shillings to put in your pocket: is that fair? You know as well as I do you've nothing to gain by leaving the place. All the world is telling it'll be yours when I'm dead. And dear knows I haven't long to live," he added with a humourous twinkle of the eye.

John Power was nearly sixty; he and his neighbours were confident that ninety would see him hale and hearty and still holding an elderly son's nose to the grindstone.

Michael was aware of this. A hundred times in a week, within the past year, his mind had been made up to take no leave and go. But he was proud. He had no one to turn to; for the abject have no friends. Bitter as was the bread he now ate, that of strangers was bitterer still. Nourishing besides a strange secret affection for his father, and helpless to help himself, he raged like a bull at the end of a rope.

"Here," said his father, eyeing him. "Get me another quart of ale."

Habit was desperately strong upon the young man, and for a moment he looked towards the

tankard, then with an angry growl turned his back and left the room.

John Power breathed hard for a moment and then laughed. He had often seen the boy's mother look like that.

CHAPTER II

THE HILLSIDE

WEARY as he was, Michael could not rest. He was too full of choler to join the men who were pouring into the great kitchen. He fetched a draught of ale, broke a loaf and put the half of it into his pocket. Then he set forth by himself, taking a path that led up to the hills; for Tallat, his father's property, lay in a pleasant valley that stretched south and westwards to the distant sea.

Michael walked with his head bent down, his mind revolving many things. Hunger of the soul had been in him since his birth, and neither heart nor mind had ever been satisfied. The strong passions of a strong man worked in him, but hard labour and a sweetness of nature had kept him sound and pure.

The beauty of the summer night by degrees won upon him; his rage cooled as the cool vapours rose about him, distilling heavy dews. He went on upwards, across small stony fields, through dark copses, coming out at last on a narrow grass

road, stone-walled on the one hand, while on the other, far down in its dingle, a little river ran audibly.

Michael sat down against the wall, and, drawing his loaf from his pocket, ate and rested in the gathering dusk. The night was full of soft sound and movement. From behind the wall came the noise of cattle feeding and blowing hard upon the grass. Bats rushed to and fro, and the white moths flittered irregularly by him.

When his bread was eaten, he still sat on. His body was terribly weary, and his empty heart and large ignorant mind both burned in him.

He leaned back his head against the wall and thought of his dead mother till the tears scalded in his eyes. "Ah, mother," he said, "it is in the bed of the grave you are lying, and your son would gladly lie down with you!"

He thought of her, not as she had been,—his handsome, wayward, drunken mother,—but as she had appeared to him on Thursdays and Fridays. On Saturday the cart went to Gurt, and he had a beating every Saturday night. But he would not think of that, nor of the scenes of the early week when he waited upon her, fetching and carrying like a little dog, while she lay upstairs; he would only think of her as she went about in her better mood, dressed in a splendid black silk gown, her brown hair piled upon her head, and ready with so many kisses for him.

He could see her now, standing up before her

husband, defying him straight to his face, and for her son's sake, too.

She was all he ever had had to love: once she was gone he was quite friendless.

Overpowered with fatigue, he sat on as the light died away: his passion was over, and a stupor of listless melancholy was coming upon him. From below the sound of the river came up to him, the many voices of its ripples blent into one hoarse noise.

"So is my life;"—thought Michael, "one fret going forward to the sea of death. And that glittering star over yonder only rises to make a mock of me. There is no mind or kindness in it all. Christ and his saints—they are all asleep together. I will call on them no more. Brutal and ignorant I have been bred, and so I will die."

A fresh wave of sullen passion stirred in him. He would do as his mother had done before him and go the way she went at last. For the first time in all his unjust days, his soul resolved upon evil. Short as it was, that motion had force and changed the life within him.

He sat there, brooding and raging, in the gathered dusk. The rabbits played like shadows in and out in the dingle below him. A white owl sailed on pointed wings from a tree near by, and floated across the path, more noiseless in its passage than the air itself.

Suddenly, from below, along the path he had trodden, he heard the singing of a small sweet voice.

To Michael, in his sad solitude, it sounded like the pleading of an angel. His heart beat. He stood suddenly up and took the shelter of a bush.

Though so small, the voice seemed to enclose within itself the vibration of a hundred tender strings. True and pure like an angelic harp, it was the sweetest music he had ever heard.

Listening intently, his keen ears distinguished the light touch upon the ground of bare travelling feet. The singing ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and the soft tread came nearer: across the field, a pause at the stile, a quick rush through the black wood, and then at the end of the path Michael saw faintly outlined th: figure of a young maid.

Her dress was short and whitish, her head uncovered; feet and face gleamed in what little light there was. Michael heard her timid breaths as she came swiftly up, and for an instant he saw her face as she went by. Pleasure and awe came to his heart as he looked. Like a face seen in running water, for one moment it shone uncertainly, rounded and white, with shining eyes, that sought through the darkness. Yet another moment, like a fluttering moth or some soft creature of the twilight, she was swallowed up in the dusk and gone.

A strange emotion seized upon Michael: that penetrating voice, that dim face that had visited him in his misery,—what earthly maid was it that owned them?

Stooping down, he pulled off his heavy shoes and ran noiselessly up the grassy road. A sudden turn of the path, and he saw on a distant slope above him a little light that burned like a star against a cottage pane.

He paused and stood considering.

"Then it was Sheila McBride going to her home," he said to himself, and he watched till he heard the echo of a voice and the sound of a clapping door. His whole thought was changed: it was as though the current of his being had leaped and then, pausing, had turned to run another way.

For one moment he had said, "Evil, be thou my good!" but the sudden resolve was overborne though not obliterated by the first rush of emotion announcing a great passion.

CHAPTER III

THE MESSENGER

SHEILA sat on the doorstone in the sun, and laughed as one by one the tiny yellow chickens fell over her bare feet.

A bowl of porridge was on her knee, and with her wooden spoon she dropped the food now on this side, now on that, inviting the chickens to climb backwards and forwards.

"Oh, mammie," she called, "look at here; they're so ticklish and they bees fallin' the whole time. Come here now."

The woman inside came forward, and leaned against the post of the door. Pale and extenuated, she gazed sadly down on her daughter.

"Don't be givin' them the good stirabout, honey; eat it yourself, my lamb."

"Oh, mammie, 'tis only a little bit, and they're so weeshy. An' I had a good supper with Nora last night. I can't eat me breakfast."

"Well, then, give it to me, me darlin', and I'll put it by for your dinner."

Sheila handed the bowl to her mother, and sat on in the doorway looking down upon the valley,

while the chickens ran piping to and fro, moving balls of yellow down. Below among the trees a faint cloud of blue smoke hung, showing where the house of Tallat stood. In winter Sheila could see the house-roof, but now it was hidden for leaves.

Her mother was baking a small cake of bread on the hearth within, and every now and then she paused and stood to look at the young head in the doorway. Sheila was seventeen years of age, but the slender agility of her form still suggested the child in the maiden. Her hair of bronze tipped with gold curled in heavy silk upon her neck. Her face was delicately painted in the colours of the mountain rose. Her large grey eyes had a wonderful brilliance; coloured and shining like the dew, they lent an expression of youthful ecstasy to her face. In them sat a naughty and indomitable spirit, for Sheila had been bred like a queen.

All the best that she had ever seen had been hers without the asking, for she was the whole treasure of her mother's heart. From babyhood a kind of innocent mischief had been her delight, and in it she had indulged for sixteen years without ever hearing the sound of a reproof.

Every tender name and title had been lavished upon her since her birth. "My darling," "love of all loves," "my treasure," "pearl of my heart," "fair rose,"—such soft words had been always in her ears like a chime of bells in that lonely place. Now when her mother spoke and called her Sheila (or Sigile, as she would have spelt it), there was a

liquid softness in her accent that spoke of unmeasured affection.

"Did Mrs. O'Hea get much of a price on her calves, Sheila, honey?"

"I don't know, mother; she was tellin' me nothin' at all. It was Nora did be talkin' all the time, an' laughin'. The foolishness of her! Not a word of sense out of her mouth, nor a thought of sense in the head of her. Nothin' but the boys an' her new scarlet dhress. Morebetoken I wouldn't make a bonfire of meself if I was her."

"She's a handsome girl, Sheila, and big, and plenty of money. She can wear anything on her back she likes and welcome."

"Mother," said Sheila suddenly, shading her eyes with her hand, "there's somebody comin' up the path from below; 'tis Mick-a-Dandy, I think."

Mrs. McBride came to the door and looked down the hillside. Her fingers trembled as she gazed through them. Presently a moving speck showed itself for a moment through the trees below.

"'Tis Mick-a-Dandy, sure enough," said she; and the two women remained to watch for his coming; the daughter's face shining with youth and happiness, the mother's face above, pale, with the mouth full of sighs, and the eyes full of tears.

The man below came upwards with extraordinary speed, and soon was on the open grassy road in full sight of the keen eyes that watched.

He was barefooted, with ragged trousers; his

coat was of stained dull red, and an old straw hat was clapped down upon his head. He came up at a rapid trot, and a yellow cur followed at his heels.

Mrs. McBride, or Aksah Daly, as the neighbours called her, giving her her maiden title, stepped past Sheila, and ran down the clover-covered slope to meet him. Sheila stood up in the door and watched her mother receive some message. Mick-a-Dandy had come up the hill like this before, and her mother always went to the town after, leaving her by herself till evening. Sheila did not mind; she could be happy alone, and the neighbours, the few there were, were always kind to her when she wanted company.

She barely noticed the pallor of her mother's face as she went by into the cottage, saying:

"I must go to the town to your dada, Sheila, alanna. I'll ready out the place when I come back."

Sheila had a laugh and a smile as she went forward to meet Mick-a-Dandy.

"May you be seven times better a year from to-day!" said he, looking at her intently.

"Good morning kindly," said she. "There's a bowl of stirabout and a sup of goat's milk in the house. Have ye e'er a crow ye can give me for that, Mick-a-Dandy?"

Instantly the man transformed himself into a cock; he strutted up and down, his head to one side, his elbows stuck out stiffly for wings. Then

he stood upon one foot, and, scraping with the other, he sent out a prodigious crow, so loud and shrill that the trees rang with it, and from below the cocks of Tallat answered him back.

Sheila laughed with all her heart.

"Well done, Mick-a-Dandy!" said she; "that's the best crow that ever I heard. Come in, come in, and sit down by the fire."

Mick-a-Dandy drew his stool close to the hearth, for, though neither heat nor cold troubled him, he liked the colour of the blaze. He took the bowl of porridge from Sheila with many courteous thanks, and ate it on his knee.

The sun came in at the door, and the yellow cur lay at his feet. His straw hat was on the back of his head, and the look of his wild countenance was sweet though strange.

Mick-a-Dandy had never slept under a roof. The ragged hunting coat upon his back had been washed by a hundred rains and faded by a hundred suns; but the man was very clean, for he bathed himself in running water both winter and summer. His eyes were of very pale blue; his hair and thin beard were red, and all his face and neck and hands were baked to a reddish brown. He had great strength and powers of endurance. No one knew how far or how fast he and his cur could run in a day.

By the time he had finished his porridge, Sheila came out from the inner room with her mother, who was now gowned and shawled in decent black.

Sheila's look was anxious, and she put an arm kindly about the elder woman.

"Ye don't look well in yerself at all at all, mammie," she said. "Don't be hurryin' on the way; meself will do the readyin' up and everythin', and you'll have a tidy place to come back to when it's night."

Aksah kissed her daughter many times. "The blessing of God on you, Sheila!" she said, and went away down the path with Mick-a-Dandy.

Sheila stood long to watch the two figures, one black and one red, the yellow cur trotting behind. Down they went, in and out of the trees, growing smaller each minute. At last they were gone, and Sheila was alone.

CHAPTER IV

SHEILA GOES FISHING

For a short while Sheila fretted; her mother was pale and not well; there was some strange trouble upon her father, she thought. But she was young, and it was her nature to be gay; so she soon cheered up and left her post of watching.

She took her besom and swept out the little cabin. Sheila was a very neat maid. Her head was full of melody and dreams, and she had a keen listening ear; yet her slender feet carried her swiftly hither and thither, and all she touched looked well that moment.

When the place was tidy, she fetched the cake of new bread, and, going to the honey-pot, made a fine breakfast for herself in place of the stirabout Mick-a-Dandy had eaten. Then she sat down to the old spinning-wheel and began to spin.

But it was not long before she tired of it; the day was too young, she could not sit still in the house. She put her wheel by, and, going out into the sun, locked the cottage door and hid the key under a stone.

She threw a scarlet kerchief over her head and then nimbly ran and slipped by turns down the long slopes of the hill. So quick was she that in ten minutes she had reached the glen below and was scrambling among the trees that bordered the river banks on either side.

Then she stopped to gain her breath, and at last sat down on a stone and pulled the kerchief from her head.

The river was sliding by her, smooth as green silk. So it ran for half the year, reflecting the green upon its banks. This spot was Sheila's delight: here she had sat her summers through, listening to the chiming of the ripples as they hurried upon the stones; their sweet music seemed to her always new yet always the same, like a rosary of pearls, never done in the telling.

Here by the river she dreamed all her dearest dreams; here with sweet odours about her, and the hushing sound of water in her ears and the green and golden splendour spread for her eyes, any future became possible; the little voices of the river seemed always to prophesy for her a golden lot.

But just then she was too heated to be comfortable. When she got her breath again, she stepped and leaped from stone to stone by the water till she came to a dark green pool, curtained and overhung. After glancing round, she slipped off her frock and shift, and plunged twice into the water, holding on to a bough, for the pool was deep in

the middle. The water was very cold, and she gasped as she went under. Then she was out again, her clothes hurried on. Cooled and refreshed, she went up the river to fish.

The water had shrunk between its banks, and the trout were languid and found it a hard matter to hide. Sheila jumped from rock to rock and waded through the shallow water. But she was not a very good fisherman, for she was not strong enough to lift the heavy stones, and she did not want to wet her frock. After an hour's hunting she had only four little fish, caught with her bare hands, strung on a fern-stalk.

Glad to rest, she took for her seat a stone that parted the current. The noise of the flowing water seemed to harp and invite her to sing. At first she only crooned to herself in soft undertone, as a bird will in the afternoon; but after a while, encouraged by the sound of the water, she began a melody in full voice.

Sheila was a musician born: those long slender fingers had never touched a musical instrument, save a cracked fiddle that old Theresa spared for a while now and then from the shelf. Sheila's instrument was her voice: her soul lived by the doors of her ears. She was always listening. She heard all the straying notes that move always with the wind, and to her ear they were lost wandering creatures, seeking for their fellows. She could sing you the song of the insects in a summer wood, she could tell you the sound made by the fall of a beech-nut

on a road, and she could whistle the note of any bird that built by the river.

Sitting on her stone, she sang on and on. She forgot herself in her singing, and her voice, clear and vibrating, went further than she knew.

It fell out that Michael Power was just coming that way. Molloy had never brought the rushes, and by the afternoon the rick was half-thatched and what rushes they had all but gone. Michael quietly made his escape; his father had gone out with the brown horse and tax-cart, and now was his chance. He would just have a look round on the mountain, he thought.

As he came up the grassy road, he heard a faint sound from the river below. He listened for a second, and then like a dropping stone went straight down the steep dingle. He leapt the rocks and bounded from one point to another. Two parts of the way down, he stopped again to listen. The voice was clear and sweet; it could be none other than Sheila's. He had heard before now of her singing.

The air was "An Draonan Donn" ("The Brown Thorn"), and the voice turned upon the grace-notes and took the leaps of the song as lightly as a bird's.

Sheila was singing the Gaelic words which tell of the sighs of the lover for the maiden who lives beyond the mountain, and who is whiter than the white blossom of the sloe:

"If now I was a sailor, slow-sailing with an easy sea,
I would write a line to you, could I but get the pen;
A cruel pity 'tis, that I cannot have you close to me
And the dew lying fresh for us in the little mountain glen."

Michael listened till the end of the verse and then came softly down, till through a gap in the trees he could see Sheila sitting on her stone in the middle of the water.

The sight of her was as delightful to his eyes as her voice was to his ears. All the air about her was dancing with green and golden lights. The sunlight poured down through the leaves and glanced along the water like moving webs of golden gossamer.

To Michael it was as though air and water and sunbeams danced to the song that came from her red mouth.

But that moment the enchantment was over: Michael's foot set a stone rolling; Sheila started, and stood up where she was.

Michael came down slowly, his heart beating fast, and stopped by the water's edge.

"God and Mary to you," he said in greeting.

"God and Mary to you, and St. Patrick," answered Sheila courteously.

"A fine voice you have," went on Michael, in English.

"It is as God gave it," answered Sheila.

"And will you come off of the stone?" asked Michael.

"I am very well where I am, thankin' you kindly," she answered.

Sheila's look was modest, but her face wore so gay a smile and her large eyes had so shining a light in them that Michael was confounded. Moreover, the water was between, and he had no precise business.

In his perplexity, his eye fell on the string of little fish.

"Is it fishin' you are?" he asked.

"Well, indeed, now, I'm a poor fisherman, as you can see very well for yourself," said Sheila with a laugh.

"Will I catch some for ye?" asked Michael eagerly; "the water's low and there ought to be a plenty of big ones to be had."

"Maybe they'd be after us from Tallat if we was to take too much," said Sheila.

"Oh, never mind about that," said Michael; and turning aside to a bush, he took off his shoes and rolled up his trousers and went seeking under the stones.

Sheila watched him, and tried to think who he could be. He was a fine big boy, she thought; pleasant in his manners and a nice face on him.

She stole her feet into the water and took two steps forward. He was after a big trout that shot away down towards the pool. Her quick eyes followed it, and she darted towards its place of refuge.

She had forgot her shyness in the sport, and for

half an hour the two hunted together and caught seven or eight trout of near a pound weight.

"That'll do now," said Sheila. "I must go back to the house. I'm terrible hungry."

"Well," said Michael, "if I haven't some food in me pocket now."

And he pulled out a hunch of bread and half a dozen green apples.

Apples were a wonderful treat to Sheila, for none could grow up the mountain where she lived. She looked at them, but said politely:

"I wouldn't think of takin' the good food from ye." And then she held out her hand for them.

Michael broke the bread for her and sat down a little apart while she ate. He never could have enough of looking at her.

"The prettiest thing ever I saw," he kept saying to himself.

He answered her simple talk at random, and when between them they had finished the apples and the bread, Sheila, a little shyly, got up to go.

"Good evenin' to you," she said.

Michael's heart fell.

"And why will ye be goin' so soon?" said he, in dismay.

"My mother's comin' home from the town," she answered, "and I've stayed too long already." Then more shyly, her eyes looking down: "And what name will I call ye?" she asked.

"Michael Power," said the young man.

Sheila looked up in amazement. "Power of Tallat?" she said. Michael nodded.

"Oh," she said, flushing, "an' me after making so bold!"

"There's no bold at all in it," he said; "In troth, I'm of small account on me own father's ground."

His tone was so bitter that Sheila looked up at him. Her grey eyes met his brown eyes straight, and in them she read all the longing and unhappiness that troubled their depths. Many a story she had heard, and she felt sorry for him. Grown suddenly sad and not knowing what to say, she turned away and stood looking at the string of fish.

Michael took a step towards her.

"They're all for you, Sheila," he said. "There's plenty of everything at Tallat, and I'm sure ye're often goin' short up there so high on the mountain."

Sheila drew up her slight figure and her nostrils dilated.

"I'm obliged to ye," she said, looking wickedly at him. "Indeed and I've got a mother who would be long before she'd see me go short, as ye call it."

Michael felt the sting in her words and his brow reddened.

"I spoke in kindness," he said slowly, after a pause.

Sheila changed in a moment; she took a quick

step and clasped her hands, and smiled pleadingly up in his face.

"There, now!" she said. "I'm astonished at meself, and I ask your pardon, Michael Power. I never meant it, indeed."

So lovely was her look that Michael's face shone like the sun in answer, and Sheila, seeing him relent, turned modestly away and picked up the string of fish.

"Look at here," she said, "I'll take the half of them. And indeed," she added, with a laugh, "sometimes I do be very tired of atin' the one thing, and that's the truth!"

"Well, look at ye," said Michael. "The like of you is delicate made and wants tender feeding. Wait now till I tell ye, Sheila. There's a very good hole here under the stone. If I do be gettin' apples or plums or shootin' a rabbit or a pheasant, I'll come and put it in the hole here and a stone in the mouth of it, and you can come and find it, as secret as the grave."

"It's very kind you are, Michael," said Sheila. "It's a pity that I don't be comin' here oftener than once in three weeks, and that'd be a terrible long time for the rabbit."

"Well, and that's true," said Michael, looking at her doubtfully. The shadow of a smile was brightening her face, as she turned and twirled the string of fish.

"You could easy come, Sheila. And it's a beau-

tiful cool place in the heat. I was watchin' ye from the trees beyond—"

Michael never finished his sentence. Sheila started, turned red, then pale, and faced him.

"That'll do, now," said she. "I'll never come here again, and I'll never speak to ye again; ye great bosthoon, to stand there and tell me that! I'll have ye to know that I come of decent folk, and I dare ye to look me in the face again, for all your Tallats, much good may they do ye! Take your fish!"

She flung them towards him and, with a sob of passion, flew away through the trees and up the hill.

Michael stared in amaze: what had he done?

Then he sat down where Sheila had been sitting and buried his face in his hands. Then he looked up and fell to caressing the little fish at the end of the string that Sheila had cast at him.

Presently he got upon his feet and walked away, with a cheerful countenance.

CHAPTER V

MISFORTUNE

HOT with shame and anger, Sheila went up the mountain. It was hard work, and the harder she found it the more she raged against Michael.

Power of Tallat: how she had heard that name cursed! And the son as bad as the father, most likely.

Half-way up the hill she sat down and panted. Something hard was in her pocket; it was a green apple, and she pitched it below. It rolled and hopped and was lost among the trees.

"I wish it might hit him," she said aloud. "But 'tis a pity after the good apple, though."

Then she flushed again, and put her hands to her face as she thought of that unlucky dip. But he could hardly have seen her. The pool was shut in like a little parlour. Then she thought of his amazed face when she had turned upon him. No, he could never have seen her, or he would not have gaped that way. In spite of herself she burst out laughing. She was sorry she had been so cross. And now, perhaps, he would not put the things in

the hole for her to find them. Well, thank God, she could do without them.

She went up the rest of the way, till by craning her neck back she could see their little white-washed cottage, with the brown thatch, where it stood in the nook of the hill. "The Last House," it was called, because none stood higher.

The door that she had left shut was now open, but all was strangely quiet there; she could hear no sound save the humming of bees in the purple heather. She had a sudden certainty of coming trouble; a sense as though calamity had set the door of her house ajar and was waiting for her on the threshold.

Chilled and afraid, she went slowly up, along the little path, and stood to listen. There was dead silence within. Then she pushed the door open.

The fire was out, and there was a heap of black clothes on the floor.

Slowly she went over: it was her mother, lying on her face along by the hearth, her arms thrown out before her.

For one short moment Sheila stood there motionless while her heart sickened and sank down; then she knelt and tried to lift the heavy form, but her strength was not equal to it. She raised the idle hands, and like dead things they dropped away.

With a cry of horror, Sheila fled out of the house.

Once out on the hill, the quiet of the gilded

afternoon restored her to herself, and she went back: then sitting on the ground she took the worn face upon her knee. So strange and painful was its look that Sheila cried out in pity.

Presently she went and fetched water and bathed the brow and tried to put a spoonful between the closed teeth: it was no use, she could not succeed. Help of some kind she must have.

There was terror to her in the thought of leaving unguarded the helpless body whose spirit had somehow wandered away.

She would try to get old Theresa, who was the nearest neighbour and a clever woman, to come to her mother while she ran for the doctor. She fetched a pillow from the bed and put it under the unconscious head, and then, after one last look, she went out, her heart reproaching her as she shut the door. Like a wild thing she flew down the hill, and then turning up by another path soon reached a little cabin about a quarter of a mile away.

The door was closed. Sheila rapped on it and called: "Theresa! Theresa!"

"Is it the fiddle you're wantin' again, Sheila?" said a cross old voice inside. "Because if it is, ye won't have it. So there, now."

"Theresa, for the love of God! me mother's dyin' or dead. Come now quick. Ye must go to her, while I run for the doctor."

The door opened at once, and an old wrinkled face looked out and Theresa Doe said kindly:

"An' what's that you're sayin', me darlin'? Is it the truth? When was she took bad?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Sheila. "She's lyin' on the floor. Oh, Theresa, where will I go for a doctor to her now?"

Theresa thought for a moment.

"There's Dr. McShane," she said. "He's the nearest, but he's dear and he's drunk. And there's Dr. Mulcahy, two miles out of Gurt: that's six from here. He's mostly drunk, too, but a kind man to the poor. Go to Dr. Mulcahy, Sheila."

"And will you go to mother, then, Theresa dear?" said Sheila, clasping her hands.

"Deed'n I will, honey," she said heartily. "I'll just change me ould body and then I'll go like the wind."

"Your body's good enough. Oh, do go to her, Theresa. She's all by herself on the mountain."

"I'll go, I'll go, alanna. You run to Dr. Mulcahy, now."

Sheila turned and went running down the path till she got to the grass road, then over fields and stiles to the cross-path that led away from their valley to the road that ran northeastward to Gurt. She stopped for a moment and thought with dismay of the long open road, her bare feet and red kerchief, the strange doctor and all the people she must meet on the way.

In that moment she caught sight of a tall broad figure going leisurely down the path in front of her.

It was Michael Power. For one moment Sheila hesitated; then she flew to him, straight as an arrow.

Michael heard a rush behind him, a touch on his arm, and there was Sheila beside him. Her face was pale as ashes, her grey eyes wide open and full of trouble, and she was gasping for breath.

"Oh, Michael, me mother's dead or dyin', beyond in the house. Michael Power, you're big and strong; I'll bless you on me knees if you'll run now and get me a doctor for her." Michael stood in amazement. "Oh, do now, Michael; if you please, Michael!" she urged passionately.

Michael laid his broad hand protectingly about her curls. In her eager distress she never noticed it. "To be sure I will, Sheila," he said kindly. "This very minute I'll go. Will I get Dr. Mulcahy?"

"Oh, do," said Sheila, and, in her relief, she sobbed for the first time. "God bless ye, Michael. I'm afraid she's very near gone. I can pay him, Michael. I've got me bee-money right enough."

"Never mind that," said Michael. "Don't cry, Sheila, now. The doctor'll be here in two hours' time."

And without another word he turned and went fast away to Tallat for a horse.

Sheila went back home and overtook Theresa as she hobbled up to the door. For the old woman had stopped to put on a good dress and a beautiful clean frilled cap under her head-shawl.

Mrs. McBride lay where Sheila had placed her. There was no breath at her lips.

Theresa knelt down and felt her heart and looked closely at her.

"It's not death yet, honey," she said, "but it's very near."

Between them they got the helpless woman to bed and undressed her.

Theresa was skilled in simples, and after much labour and pains she succeeded in restoring the sick woman to herself. Slowly she opened her eyes, but for long she lay in bitter pain of body, which Sheila must watch and see.

In all her suffering her mother's eyes followed her and she often tried to speak. Then Sheila must smile out of her pale face from which all joy had vanished, and speak comforting words when she felt no comfort.

The doctor came as Michael had promised, but he could do little to make the sick woman easier. He said a few words to Theresa, out of the young girl's hearing, and then went away, promising to come again next day.

Late that night Theresa nodded on her stool by the fire, and Mrs. McBride called her daughter to her.

"Sheila, vein of my heart," she said, "I'm goin' from ye."

"Don't say it, mother," said Sheila bravely, kissing the cold hand that had always tended her so kindly.

There was no light in the room save the gleams that flickered in through the open door from the turf fire in the kitchen beyond.

"Sheila," she went on, "you're young to be left; I'm in grief and woe to think of it. If I get the grace of God, I'll look down from anywhere I am to watch after your comin's and goin's."

Sheila's heart was near to bursting, but she did not weep, only stroked her mother's hand.

"Listen now to me, O secret love," said the sick woman, "till I tell you about your father. Did ever ye hear tell anythin' strange about him?"

"Ne'er a word," answered Sheila.

"I never could bring me tongue the lenth of tellin' ye. 'It is God keeps the child innocent,' I always said to myself. But did ye never see anythin' strange on him when I did be takin' him away?"

"I was thinkin' he was very sick, mother, and you were sorry to part," said Sheila, scarce able to speak.

Mrs. McBride turned restlessly in her bed.

"Sheila," she said, "he was sick indeed. There was a cruel complaint on him, and the pain tore him day and night till he could bear no more, and madness came upon him and he was like to do murder. He threw you down the rocks one day when you were a little one, Sheila, and was near to killin' us both. And, mind you, Sheila, a decent, kind, God-fearing man and born to a better place than this. After that, when the pain came on him I

had to take him walking every step of the way to the asylum, and then they tied him up like a dog till the madness was off him. It has worn my heart out, Sheila, and it'll burst it like a nut before day. Oh, brightness of my heart, the sight my eyes have seen this day! He's gone, Sheila, your dada is gone. He died upon his feet and leapt up the height of a man and more, a minute before he went. A kind man like him.... Sheila, God Almighty is hard upon his children."

Mrs. McBride gasped as she lay.

"Call Theresa," she said. "I must have a priest."

Trembling in every limb so that she scarce could stand upon her feet, Sheila went and awoke the old woman, who grumbled as she got up from her stool.

Sheila stood still by the fire. Her head was numb, and she shivered and trembled though the night was warm. Theresa came back.

"Look out at the night, honey," she said. "I must go for a priest. But it's cruel work for an old woman like me."

Sheila opened the door without a word.

Outside sweet peace slept upon the hill. In the immeasurable distances of heaven swam the multitude of the stars.

As the breath of the night touched her sorrow-stricken eyes, burning tears rose to them.

"God Almighty is hard upon his children," she

said, echoing her mother's words as she looked at the magnificence above her.

Theresa called from within, and she went back.

"The moon is down, Theresa," she said, "but there's light enough on the path."

Theresa set out at last, a stick in her hand, her old heart quaking. Then Sheila went back to her mother, who seemed anxious about something and was fumbling in the bed.

Presently she brought out a little bag of money and a little book containing a paper.

"There's fifty pounds for you in the bank, Sheila," said she. "We kept it all the time. And it's all we had left since we left the ould place. Come what might, we never touched it. I'll speak to the priest that your father and me is to be buried together, and you'll pay for everything decent, Sheila, and follow us both to the grave."

Aksah seemed to forget all her anxiety about the daughter she had so protected till now; everything but memory seemed to be slipping from her. She rested all her dying sorrows on Sheila's trembling shoulders. And Sheila soothed and comforted her without a thought for herself. She was still feebly talking when Theresa came back.

"I met a man on the hill," she said. "A decent boy he was, and he said he'd go for the priest. 'Thank God,' says I. 'I was afraid of me life of the dark.'"

With the dawn Father O'Brien came. He was

a young man, severe and grave, known through the country for his austerity and great learning.

The women were abashed before him, and Theresa and Sheila curtseyed to the ground. For some time he was alone with the dying woman and heard her confession. Then he called in the two who had waited outside. He had pity on Sheila's tender youth, and placed his hand upon her head.

"The Lord support you, my daughter," he said, "for your affliction is sudden and great."

While he delivered them the sacrament the dawn whitened at the window, and the women forgot their trouble. When he prayed it seemed as though the roof was lifted off the poor cottage; the guttering candle, the mean room, sickness and tears were all forgotten, and their suffering spirits reposed on the Almighty will.

When he had gone Aksah fell into an untroubled sleep. Theresa went back to her stool, and Sheila, looking at her mother's peaceful face, took some thought of hope.

Wearied out, she stretched herself along the floor by the bedside, and that instant fell fast asleep.

While she slept her mother's spirit went away, never to return.

Sheila's childhood was over and done, and with the new day she woke to sorrow and care.

CHAPTER VI

MICK-A-DANDY'S DINNER

THAT night Mick-a-Dandy ran twenty miles on a message to a well-to-do farmer in the next county. And all he got for his trouble was a piece of sour bread and a drink of buttermilk, besides twopence. "They were a mean family, God forgive them," he said to himself. He slept under a new hayrick and was up in the early dawn. As he crossed through the fields of his stingy host he picked up, not without a sense of sin, three fine potatoes that seemed to roll themselves up to his feet. With these in his pocket and without breaking his fast he and his cur trotted back the way they came.

When it was broad morning, he found himself near the highroad to Gurt. He jumped over the wall and sat down on a heap of stones. It was Thursday, and that day Peter Brady came up from the little village of Port Drothan, walking by his cartload of holy Friday's fish.

Peter travelled silent all night till daybreak, and then began his loud cry. All along the way the

women would be expecting him. Sometimes they would be at the door, dressed and ready for the news. Sometimes there would be an arm thrust forth with a plate, and the door closed on the rest. The laziest of all would put a plate with a penny on it, or perhaps twopence, on the wrong side of the door, and trust in God that no rogues might pass.

Mick-a-Dandy had measured his time well: he had not sat waiting ten minutes before he heard the cry, and, the wind being from that direction, he also perceived an agreeable odour of fish.

Mick-a-Dandy crowed like a cock in his ditch, and the yellow cur sat up and howled.

Peter Brady put up the money he had been counting along the road, and pondered what cottage was so near. He was a little damaged man with crooked legs and one eye. In his youth he had had intentions upon the priesthood, and could still do a sharp bargain in Latin.

After some conversation Mick-a-Dandy succeeded in wiling from him one large herring for his own dinner, and some strange morsels for the dinner of his cur. For all this Mick-a-Dandy only paid a halfpenny. He set out again, his own dinner in his pocket and his dog's dinner in his hand: towards this hand the cur continually leaped as they went along. Every now and then Mick-a-Dandy stooped and picked up a dry stick.

By eleven o'clock they were back in the bog of Gronna, which lay in the arm of the widening

valley through which flowed the little river Carrow.

Mick-a-Dandy knew every inch of the bog. It was only cut here and there, exceedingly elastic under foot, and covered in rough heather and sweet gale.

He had slept upon it and run upon it and had a hiding-hole in the middle of it. He felt himself his own man there, and did not meet a living soul upon it above once or twice a year.

A black stump of an old tree stood up in sight. Mick-a-Dandy made for it, and put his dog's dinner in the fork. Then he took off his old coat, hung it like a flag on the end of the stump, and with his bundle of sticks began to build a fire on a black circle of burnt ground. When it was laid and ready he dug with his hands under the tree-stump and brought up a little tin pot, a blue-patterned plate, a two-pronged fork, and a horn snuff-box full of salt—all the household plenishing he had.

Then he ran to a pool hard by, fetched a little water in his pot for the potatoes, while his cur sat steadily regarding the top of the tree-stump.

From the pocket of his red coat Mick-a-Dandy took a tinder-box, and soon had a light and a fire and his pot on it. Then he sat down and rested himself while the hot sun mounted to noon.

When the potatoes were half cooked Mick-a-Dandy took them out of the pot and laid them affectionately to bake in the ashes. Then he took

the handsome herring, stuck it on a fork, propped the fork on a cross-stick, and set it to toast.

Soon a savoury smell began to go up and spread abroad with the blue smoke; the cur whined, and Mick-a-Dandy got his plate ready.

Once more he turned both herring and potatoes, and while he watched them he talked to his dog, who sat on his haunches beside him and howled at every pause for answer.

"Sit easy, Colonel dear," he said, "and have a little patience and we'll begin at the one time and eat fair. Here's a dinner the like of which hasn't crossed our lips this three weeks and more, for they give us the old ancient pitates that have lain in the pot, Colonel dear, and they think that, bein' soft in the head, we never could tell the differ. And as for the fish and the flesh, Colonel dear, you and me know well enough that some people's charity is mighty strong. And now I ask ye to look at that herrin' that's the size of a man's shirt-front, and the good fish that's there in the tree, and thim three lovely pitates, and say what can be better than the best of a good thing?"

The moment was come: his dinner was cooked.

He reached down his dog's portion, and threw it a little distance off, fetched out the potatoes from the ashes and arranged them on a flat stone, laid the herring on the blue plate, and sat down, the most contented man in the country; for hunger is mere pleasure in the face of victuals.

But Mick-a-Dandy was a baptised Christian, and

he waited to bless his meat. As he did so the cur looked up from his ravenous repast and growled.

A moment after came a shout: "Hoi! Hullo, there!"

The cur gave one howl, and, with his tail between his legs and the remains of Peter Brady's alms sticking out of his mouth, fled hard away in the opposite direction.

Mick-a-Dandy stood up and saw a gentleman with two red setters at his heel, and a hare and a brace of grouse in his hand.

Mick-a-Dandy put on his old coat of ceremony, laid the plate by the fire and covered it with brands, and went forward a step or two.

It was Mr. John Mylotte, a gentleman of some property on the other side of the bog.

Mick-a-Dandy touched his red forelock.

"Hullo!" spoke out the gentleman. "So its you, Mick-a-Dandy. What are you cooking there, you sly dog? 'Pon my honour, I'm famished."

"Oh, God bless yer honour," said Mick-a-Dandy, making a leg, "it's only a mane herrin' and three poor pitates. If it was a better dinner, I'd be proud for yer honour to share it."

Mylotte arrived at the fire.

"Begad," he said, "you've got a good home here."

One of the dogs came sniffing about the potatoes, and he gave it a kick.

"Where's the herring?" said he. "Faith, since you offer it, I'll not refuse."

"Your honour's not jokin'?" said Mick-a-Dandy. "Indeed, and I'd be proud."

Mylotte sat down with his back against the tree-stump, and Mick-a-Dandy with a beaming face fetched up the herring and presented it.

"Will I peel a pitate for yer honour?" he said. And down he went on his knees to the stone.

Mylotte was enjoying himself. He ate rapidly, almost voraciously. He had a powerful jaw and a handsome mouth; his nose was fine and high. It was a face with a great intention. Of uncommon beauty of form, it was dominated by a low mean brow. The skull was flat, the hair of a beautiful golden hue, curled on his reddish skin.

He looked prosperous; his drab shooting-suit was of handsome cloth and well cut.

"Mick-a-Dandy," said he, "I sold another bullock this morning."

"Ah, did ye now?" said Mick-a-Dandy with great sympathy. "They'll be getting low with yer honour, I dare say now."

"There's only fifteen of them left," said he. "And when the last one goes, I'm done."

"Never say done, yer honour," said Mick-a-Dandy, peeling the second potato.

"What's this I hear about money coming to O'Hea's daughter?" he asked; adding with emphasis: "The best cooked potato, Mick-a-Dandy, and the best cooked herring I've eaten since I was a boy."

"Ah, sure yer honour's makin' a fool of me,"

said Mick-a-Dandy, eyeing the peel, and finally putting it in his pocket. "Indeed they tell me O'Hea's daughter is come into a second fortune from her uncle in America. The money pours into these people like water to a river."

"What sort is the daughter?" asked Mylotte.

"Pretty much the same sort as meself, yer honour, only she doesn't know it."

"She'll do well enough, then," said Mylotte. "A woman's better without sense if she has money. But, upon my honour, Mick-a-Dandy, you have wits enough for any man."

"Ah, no, sir," said Mick-a-Dandy, looking sadly at him with his pale blue eyes. "I do often be very bothered in my head." Then in a desperation of courtesy he asked: "Will I peel the last pitate for yer honour?"

"Peel away, me boy," answered the other, chucking the head and tail of the herring to the setters.

Mylotte seemed to fall into an abstraction as he finished his lunch and put down the plate for the dogs to lick.

"You're often at Tallat, Mick-a-Dandy?" he said at last.

"Sometimes, yer honour," said Mick-a-Dandy, watching the dogs feasting in a cold despair.

"Will ye carry a message to Mr. Power there?" he asked.

"Old Mr. Power or young Mr. Power, sir?"

"Not the young lout: Mr. Power of Tallat.

Will you say a word to him without telling who sent you?"

"To be sure, sir," said Mick-a-Dandy.

"Will ye say to him: 'Cave cards and old Willie the Devil'?"

"To be sure, sir, I will, if you'll kindly say it three times for me."

Mylotte repeated it clearly three times. Then he took a draught of brandy from a flask, lit a pipe at the embers, and got up to go on his way. "Have a drop of brandy?" he said carelessly.

"No, sir," said the poor man, "I do never be takin' it, thankin' ye kindly all the same. Me head is too weak for the drink."

Mylotte put his hand in his breeches pocket.

"By George!" he said, "I left the price of the bullock at home. Mick-a-Dandy, I'll owe ye sixpence for the dinner and the message, though I don't doubt you're a richer man than I am this minute. Good day to ye now." With a nod he took up the grouse and the hare.

"Give us a crow, Mick-a-Dandy, before I go."

"I'm afraid I have ne'er a one left in me, sir," answered the poor man, the water standing in his eyes.

"You're a lazy beggar! How do you expect to make your living at that rate?" said the other with an air of offence, as he went off.

Mick-a-Dandy sat down mournfully by the embers, took the potato-peels out of his pocket and began to chew them.

Then so great a pang of hunger and disappointment seized him that he dropped his head upon his knees and wailed like a child.

His wiser cur came and sat near him in the merry sunshine, and howled and whined for sympathy.

CHAPTER VII

LONELINESS

NEXT day, and the next after it, Sheila remained passive in the hands of Theresa Doe.

The old woman was skilled in death. All its long-used ceremonies were dear to her. The bathing and the new linen; the solemn bed with the pale face bound with a white cloth, so still between the candles; the crying company of women that thronged the little rooms—all this of use and wont, Sheila, dry-eyed and despairing, must endure.

She was pale as she went about, doing submissively what Theresa bade her,—offering goat's milk, bread, and whiskey to the women, who pitied her but soon forgot their crying, and filled all the little cabin with their talk.

But in her heart was rebellion. Theresa and these women had taken her mother from her. Hardly could she make her way through them to the awful bed. She would not cry or weep before them; her sorrow longed for solitude as the dead body longed for the ground. What, she thought, had that cold stone-like figure within there to do with all this company? Her heart alone in the wide

world, like a stone within her bosom, comprehended and was akin to it.

As she went quietly about, the determination grew up in her mind to stay there in that little cottage by herself. She could not go and live with Theresa Doe. Their minds and their ways were not alike. She would rather have her liberty. She could make her own living with her bees and her spinning; then she could sit on one side of the hearth, and her grief and orphanhood on the other, and no one to meddle between.

But she kept all this to herself, and when she heard the women whispering of how Peter and Brigid Maloney were for taking the little house and that they'd better take the few sticks of furniture off the child as well, she said not a word.

"The poor girl's moidhered," said the women kindly, and let her alone. During the long nights of watching, sleep would sometimes overtake her as she crouched upon the ground in the corner of the wall; seeing it, some motherly woman would take the nodding head upon her knee, and smooth the silken hair and murmur kind words, touched by the beauty of the suffering face. Then Sheila would have a short peace, dreaming of an evening sun and her mother sitting by the door.

Early on Saturday morning Sheila was dressed in a long black gown; she would not wear a hat, but, instead, covered her head in a black shawl which she could draw over her face at need.

Eight men carried the coffin down the hill. In a dream Sheila followed, walking by Theresa's side, thinking of those still feet in their narrow house that had gone so often up and down, and now must be carried on before; of the folded hands that had once been so careful for her, and now could never help her more.

Still in a dream, she stood by the grave in the desolate weed-grown churchyard.

It was market-day in Gurt, and the news of the double burial drew many people to the churchyard, till coloured head-shawls and petticoats formed a deep circle outside the centre of black.

There were some minutes of waiting before the men from the asylum brought up their charge; but at last they came; and as the people parted, making a lane through which the dead husband came to join the wife, a sudden emotion seized upon the women. Sighs were heard, and sobs, and the crowd moved as though some gust of wind had caught their garments; the sun shone fully out, and Sheila raised her head in a sudden wonder at all the kind faces that were stirred by her grief.

But when the last hurried words of the priest had fallen upon her ear and her father and mother were laid in the same dark bed, and the covering earth smoothed down, the chill and loneliness came back to her heart; for the men and women who had looked so compassionately at her began to stream towards the churchyard gate, and Theresa came up and whispered in her ear:

"Listen to me, honey," she said; "the people are come a long way, a lot of them, and the men is wore out with the heavy coffin down the hill, and so kind an' all; and they've had nothin' to spake of up at the house, and it'll be worth it to you, and double as much, if ye was to give them a pound among them for refreshments."

Sheila nodded silently, and searching in her under-pocket, brought out the bag her mother had given her. It was nearly empty; she took a sovereign from among the few coins it contained and handed it to Theresa, whose eyes gleamed as she clutched it from her.

"Come on, then," she said; "it's to Mrs. Muldoon's in the town we'll go."

And she hurried off to speak to the oldest of the men who had acted as bearers.

Sheila thought she saw her chance; she drew the black shawl right over her face, holding it tight under her chin, and slipped round by the churchyard wall, out at the gate and down the road.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DRIVE

ONLY one person in the churchyard had noted Sheila's sudden movement.

Every Saturday Michael Power drove the tax-cart into Gurt for the necessary market-business. This morning he got through his business quicker than usual, so as to attend the funeral in the churchyard outside the town.

He hardly recognised Sheila in her new livery of mourning, the long gown and the glimpse of white face showing under the fold of the black shawl. But once he had found her his eyes never quitted her.

He watched her out and along the road; then he ran back into the town to the inn-yard where the horse and trap were waiting, the reins hitched to a hook in the van.

He had to drive slowly through the streets because of the people and the booths, and more than one man hailed him as he went, but he took no notice, and went straight on till he got clear of the town, with his face turned to the hills.

There was a long stretch of road before him, and

no Sheila anywhere. His heart sank, as he thought she must have taken another way.

He walked his horse, while he considered what he should do. Suddenly he spied, some distance in front of him, a black figure sitting still in the ditch. It was Sheila, who had stopped to unlace her stiff new boots; for the walk before her was long and she was already tired out

Michael would not drive up to her. He jumped down and led the horse along the road till he came opposite to her.

Sheila stood up: her face was strange and unfamiliar. She seemed far removed from him in her grief. Michael stopped a moment before addressing her.

"God be with you, Sheila," said he. "This is the sad day for you, so young and little as you are."

Sheila's face quivered a little, but she did not speak. She had reached the limit of her powers of endurance.

"Is it to the mountain you are going?" asked Michael.

"It is," answered she.

"Get up in the cart, then, and I will drive you," said Michael.

Sheila turned aside and shook her head. She wanted to be alone.

"Come," said Michael, "you'll be destroyed with that long road, and you half killed with fretting and a face on ye as white as fleece. Get up at once."

Sheila silently turned to mount the step, but Michael took and lifted her up.

Then he got to his place by her side. Sheila sat silent, too worn for any comfort. Michael thought of many things to say. One form of words after another came to his lips, but still he could not speak them. Sheila's grief seemed to sit by his side, and separate them. Invisible, yet cold and real, like a pane of glass between them, it chilled all the warmth of his heart.

The horse was a quick trotter and in a very short time had gone the five miles to the cross-path that led up to the mountain. There she must get down and go by herself.

He stopped the horse and spoke.

"Have you got relations that you're goin' to, Sheila?" he asked.

"None that wants me," said Sheila.

"Where are you goin' to stay to-night?" he asked.

"In me own house," she answered.

"God help you!" said Michael. "You can't stay there by yourself."

"That is just what I will do," answered Sheila; "I've had too much of company. But I thank you, Michael, for your kindness; I will never forget it." and she turned to step down.

"Wait a moment, Sheila," said Michael. "Who is it your mother pays her rent to?"

"To Thomas Duffy, that is steward to Mr. Willie the Devil," she answered.

"You'd best go and see him," he said, "the first thing in the morning, or they'll take the little house from over your head. Mr. Duffy is a respectable man, Sheila, but don't you go talking to young Mr. Willie or old Mr. Willie either. And see here, Sheila," he went on, "what rent do you pay?"

"Four shillings a quarter," said Sheila.

"Well," said he, "very like there'll be others offering a present, so look here," and he took a small gold coin from his pocket; "do you give this to Mr. Duffy, and it's very like he'll let you stay on."

"You're very kind," she said. "But put up your money. Them that's gone hasn't left me without. Good-bye, Michael, and I'll mind what ye tell me."

And she turned away up the path, walking quickly, with her head bent down, in the attitude of sorrow.

Michael watched her till she was out of sight and then drove on; but his heart was still following her up the hill paths.

CHAPTER IX

CONSOLATION

SHEILA went on up the mountain and reached the door of the familiar cottage that was to be her own now.

She had a sense of home-coming as she neared it, but that vanished as she opened the door.

Inside, a black hearth, desolation, and foul air proclaimed her orphanhood. Sheila was wearied almost to death, but here there was no rest for her, she saw.

Trembling, with eyes turned away, she went into the little inner room, and fetched one of her short flannel frocks: hurriedly she stripped off her cumbrous black, and then once more in her childish dress she took some bread in her hand and went up the hill above the house, through fern and heather.

The day was heavy and sultry, and at last she lay down under a rock. She turned on her side in the shadow and fell fast asleep and dreamed—dreams of the most delicious peace and comfort: she was a swallow and sailed upon the air; she was a fish and floated in the cool sea. She saw strange and

beautiful faces, and talked with harmonious voices, when no one was there. She slept on and on, till afternoon was turning to evening; then suddenly she woke from her delight, and her heart was ice in her bosom.

She lay among the heather and ferns, all whose small lovely shapes she knew so well, and marvelled at the strange pain about her heart.

Then with a rush memory came back to her, and she turned over on her face and lay like dead.

She could not think and she could not wish: every faculty was swallowed up in a numbness of misery.

She heard a noise of feet climbing slowly up the hill, moving hither and thither, now stopping, now going on again.

She did not heed: what matter if all the world came up and saw her there?

The footsteps came nearer slowly, and at last stood still beside her, and Michael's voice called her.

"Sheila!" Then a pause, and then "Sheila!" again. She lifted her heavy head and looked up at him; and Michael's heart nearly failed him at the misery of her face.

Then Sheila saw he was carrying something in his arms.

Michael went down on one knee beside her.

"See here now," said he. "You must have some livin' thing by you, Sheila, or indeed I'm in fear that you will die. I am nursing this pup this six

weeks, and no one knows a word of him but me. Take him, Sheila; he's a grand one, and will be a good dog and keep your house for you."

Sheila sat up, and Michael put the broad fat puppy on her lap. It was large and heavy and rose up with its paws on her breast and licked her face. At the touch, Sheila looked into Michael's face and then at the dog, and then back at Michael again. The deep sorrow of his look worked upon her, and her face trembled and broke up like water under a gust of wind; she burst into gasping sobs and weeping, till Michael's heart nearly died in him for sorrow.

"Hush now, whisht now!" said Michael. "God help me, what will I do with ye, at all?"

"Go away," she gasped, "but leave me the little dog."

"Will I send some decent woman to ye?" he asked doubtfully.

"No, no," she said, "go away, and leave me the little dog." And she bent down her head and buried her face in its yellow coat.

Doubtfully he rose up and looked down at her, so small and solitary in that wild place.

"It's a grown hound I ought to have brought ye," he said. "But he wouldn't have stayed. I have called this one Magra, but he hasn't learned his name rightly yet. Now, if anybody hinders you, Sheila, you just put a word in the little hole we know of, or send Mick-a-Dandy for me. Don't cry now, Sheila. Get up and go to your house, and

light a fire, and say your prayers, Sheila, and may God lighten your sorrow."

"Go away, go away," sobbed Sheila. "I thank you, indeed, but I am not able to bear any company."

"Good night, then," he said, and went sadly away down the hill.

The pup tried to follow him and struggled in Sheila's arms, but she held him tight while her tears still fell down; then she thought of the bread she had brought with her, and first breaking off a piece for herself, she gave it to the dog, who sat quiet and ate it greedily.

Presently she gathered him up in her arms, and came down the hill to her cottage. By the door was a basket with a cake of bread, and apples and plums.

Sheila felt a little comfort reviving in her heart. With averted face she went in and tied the dog beside a chair, where it kept up a continual sharp bark.

Rapidly she worked, first lighting a brilliant fire on the hearth. She drew out the heavy bedding, she swept and cleaned; she ranged all the empty bottles behind the house. In her big tub she washed all the cups and pans. Then she went out and cut heather and fern, and carried in great bundles to fill up the bedstead. Her white goat followed her to and fro, waiting to be milked: she stood at the door, looking angrily at the squealing puppy, and threatening it with her long horns.

Sheila must work hard and late. The evening light died, and she went busily on by the firelight, keeping down her night fears, which seemed to beckon at the little pane, step around the house, and tap at the door.

At last all was fresh and sweet, and by the blazing firelight Sheila could rest, and say her evening prayer, and weep the memory of her living mother with a softer sorrow. The horror of cold and rigid death had gone from her heart, and she could think of the love which had followed her all her early days and had promised besides to keep watch from its new place.

The dog shared her supper of goat's milk and bread and fruit, and was glad enough afterwards to sleep in Sheila's arms on the soft bed of heather with its woollen coverings. And when Sheila moaned or cried in the night the pup would start up and lick her face and hands and then settle down again to sleep.

CHAPTER X

THE MESSAGE

MICHAEL came down the hill in the evening light, and when he got to the house, his father was standing inside the yard-gate, with a tandem whip in his hand.

"Where have ye been?"

"Up the mountain," answered Michael.

"Ye're going up that way very often, I'm told, of late. And taking your time there, too. What new game are ye playing up there?"

"Well," said Michael, looking coolly at him, "you said I could go to hell on the ten shillings to-day, if I liked."

"Take care of yourself," said John Power sternly. "I'm a nasty man when I'm angry, as you know. And my will is still to make."

Michael was turning over in his mind what answer he should give, when the hounds barked, and Mick-a-Dandy came round the corner into the yard.

He had a wild and harassed look, and seemed not so clean as usual. He was timid, too, for John Power was one of the few men he feared.

"Hello, Mick-a-Dandy!" said Michael. "Where are you from?"

"From going up and down, yer honour."

"What brings you here again?" said Power, frowning, not best pleased that he should give the son his title of respect. "I won't have loafers here."

"I was sent on a message to yer honour," said Mick-a-Dandy, staring about him.

"Out with it, then."

"If yer honour would kindly wait till I pull me memory together. I'm a bit moidhered these two days." And he pressed his hand on his forehead.

"Leave that play-acting," said Power, "or there'll be no supper for you. Let us have a crow now, Mick-a-Dandy."

"Come on, boy!" he said, as Mick-a-Dandy stood looking vacantly at him, and raising his long whip, he flicked him smartly on the legs.

Mick-a-Dandy yelled and skipped, and Power laughed and brought down the whip again.

"I'll crow, yer worship; I'll crow and welcome!" he stammered. He ran out of reach of the lash and strutted up and down by the wall, and crowed with a shrill metallic note that echoed in all the roofs. The hounds howled aloud, and the horses plunged in their stables; the men-servants who stood in the doors laughed.

Power turned aside and spoke an order or two and then came back to Mick-a-Dandy.

"Now," said he, taking out his watch, "I'll give

ye one minute and then out with your message, or off ye go and no supper."

Mick-a-Dandy stood and scratched his head.

"Now," said John Power, and snapped his watch.

Mick-a-Dandy came up and whispered the message from behind his hand.

"Yer honour is to take care of card-parties and old Willie the Devil."

Power stood where he was, and his red face grew redder. The veins of his forehead swelled and his hands clenched.

Mick-a-Dandy with his mouth open and the joints of his knees quailing beneath him, began to sidle away and then softly went backwards till he got into the turf-house, from whence he could look out with safety.

"Damnation!" said Power at last. "I thought they were up to some tricks. Mick-a-Dandy! Where's Mick-a-Dandy?"

He looked round but a moment too late. Mick-a-Dandy's head had disappeared behind the turf-house door.

"He went off with himself, sir," said old Gunyon, the house-servant, who was standing by.

"I'll skin him alive," said Power to his son, "but I'll find out who sent that message. Come to me after my dinner. Maybe I'll have something to say to you."

"Very well, sir," said Michael, and stood where he was, waiting till his father had left the yard. So

soon as he was gone Mick-a-Dandy appeared in the doorway, wiping the sweat from his forehead with his hand.

Michael went up to the poor man as he stood by the door-post.

"What's the matter with ye, Mick-a-Dandy?" he said kindly.

"Me belly's empty, yer honour, and me head's addled, like."

"Come back here into the turf-house," said Michael. "You shall have a sup of something and a place to rest yourself."

"Ah, sir," said Mick-a-Dandy, as he turned about, "your honourable father, God bless him, is a terrible man. The bones of me legs turn to water when he does be lookin' at me."

"Sit down now, Mick-a-Dandy. Gunyon, send Ellen here with some food."

Mick-a-Dandy had the good will of all the country, excepting only of the cruel, who hate what they torment.

So it was not a minute before Ellen, the kitchen-maid, came with a plate of hot potatoes and gravy, and then again with a bowl of milk and bread.

The poor man's gratitude overflowed, and with each mouthful he uttered a blessing.

Michael sat down by his side to talk to him. "Listen to me now, Mick-a-Dandy," he said. "Do ye know Sheila McBride, that lives in the Last House?"

"Rightly, sir," said Mick-a-Dandy.

"Well, then," went on Michael, "it's likely you know that she's left this night without either father or mother, alone upon the mountain. Now," said he, taking a shilling from his pocket, "here's for you, and more money besides than ever you saw together in your life, if you'll only have an eye to Sheila. For she is a good girl and one that respects herself, and I think it pity that she should come to harm. Now if anybody that you know of is offering to do a haporth to her, just you let me have word and I'll settle them."

"Indeed'n' I will so, yer honour," said Mick-a-Dandy with a sudden heartiness. "And I ask ye to believe me that I'd do it without the shillin'. And maybe I'd go for to have a try at them meself. And a thousand thanks to yer honour. Heaven prosper all your care for you, and may your bed in paradise be brighter than the sun!"

CHAPTER XI

THE HOUSE OF KILLARAA

On Monday morning early Sheila started for the distant house of her landlord. She must take Magra with her, and he was still so foolish in his behaviour that she knew she would have to carry him in her arms a part of the way.

So it was that, having a long distance to travel on foot, she started before the sun was well up. She had shortened her black frock that it might not catch the dew. On her arm she carried the black shawl, and a basket with her boots and stockings in it, and some bread and honey.

She locked the cottage door and hid the key in a new place. The three hives were on their stools, and the bees all sound asleep within. But the goat chose to follow her the first part of her journey. This morning she did not take the path that led down to Tallat, but another leading away to the right across the hills.

It was a morning of mist and vapour. The little river Carron below lay rolled as if in wool to the tops of the trees.

As Sheila went along, her bare feet and ankles

were bathed in the cold dew, and her curling hair was soon strung with the smallest beads of vapour.

Her heart was very sore. Tears, in large drops, stood in her grey eyes and did not fall. She was tired of crying.

Her loneliness was like pain of body to her. Her whole being longed for the hands that had taken her comfort in their going, for the heart that loved her and was gone from her heart, for the feet the sound of whose going to and fro was to be no more in her ears.

Her one pleasure was the heavy dog she carried; she dared not put him down, for fear of the goat who was jealous and who still followed her.

Magra played in her arms and licked her face. Now and then she bent down and rubbed her cheek in his beautiful yellow coat. More often than she knew she thought of the friend who had given him, with a sense of protection and comfort.

Her spirits rose as she went on. The morning air was pure and sweet, and when at last she could put down her dog, there was no end to his merriment.

The look of Sheila's face grew young again as she watched him; the red came to her lips and a flush to her cheek, and the tears dried up on her lashes. For two miles they went along, she and the dog, by the highest hill-paths, till, on reaching the top of a climbing brow, another valley was there beneath her and she stood to get her breath.

Below, all was a swimming sea of milk-white

mist: barely the tops of the trees might be seen like islands in a white water. As Sheila stood to look, the mounting sun began to pierce through the light veil overhead, and the mist below began to tremble and smoke upward in wreaths. Sheila's thoughts went upward too, lifting up her sorrow with them: in loneliness and trouble she was beginning to grow wise.

She sat down on a flat stone to rest; the puppy, tired with play and his own weight, lay on her black skirt to sleep. The sun broke fully out, and everywhere the mist fled up and vanished. All around her the dewdrops upon grass and ferns caught and divided the light. Every blade was decked with perishing jewels, glowing like rubies and sapphires, topaz and emerald.

When she took her way again, the mists were almost gone, and below in the valley she could see the groves of trees that hid the house of Killaraa, whither she was bound.

Running and walking she soon got down, and at a decent distance from the steward's house stopped to lace on her boots and arrange the black shawl over her head.

Sheila had been with her mother before to Thomas Duffy's, so she felt no anxiety. But when they told her at the door that Mr. Duffy was gone up to the mansion on business and would be three or four hours gone and she had best go after him, she began to be uneasy.

She went up the long avenue, her heart beating

a little. She heard dogs baying as she neared the house, and going round by the back way stood outside the haggart, waiting for some one to take her in.

It was not long before a slovenly-looking yard-boy came down by the haggart. Sheila asked him for Mr. Duffy, and he civilly enough went before her through the yard and as far as the kitchen door, kicking aside one or two growling dogs who followed her.

It was a large stone-floored room: three beggars sat on a form by the fire, and a stout woman stood talking to them, her arms akimbo. A man in livery sat on the long table reading a crumpled newspaper. A couple of maids went in and out.

The stout woman in authority asked Sheila's business.

"Well," she said doubtfully, "Duffy's with Mr. Willie; I doubt he can see you. Turbat," she said to the man in livery, "will you take this young woman's message in to Mr. Willie?"

"Not likely," said Turbat, with a glance at Sheila. "It would be as much as my life was worth." And he went on with his paper.

The stout woman told Sheila to wait, and gave her a stool by the fire opposite the three beggars.

The two men were blind, and each carried a fiddle under his arm; their faces were wrinkled but brown and jolly enough. The woman who sat in the midst had her sight, and her face was smooth but it was very pale, and her hair was white.

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Sheila gazed at her in wonder, for she looked as if the sun had never shone on her. As she sat on her stool she began to pay attention to the talk that was going busily forward.

"Times are changing, times are changing," the oldest of the two men was saying. "The devil's with us yet and goin' about the country, but he wears a better coat on him, and behaves himself with more decency in the daylight."

"We're little the better for that," said the pale woman. "The feelin's that's hidden are more bitterer than them that's shown."

"They're apt to be less inconvaynient to other people," said the fat housekeeper.

"Maybe: at the first go-off," said the other old fiddler.

"Ay," said the pale woman; "the long last is only known to God Almighty."

"Well," said the housekeeper, "Daniel, you can remember—you're old enough and to spare—the goin's on of old Killaraa above: him and Power of Tallat and the whole of that gang. Why, there wasn't a decent house that didn't go in fear of them young hell-scrapers. The country's a long sight better off now."

"To be sure it is, ma'am; to be sure it is," said old Daniel politely, now turning toward the flushed housekeeper, and now sniffing the large pot of potatoes that hung on the crook above a company of saucepans—the alms of the poor cooking among more savoury viands.

"God send ye right, ma'am!" said the other old man peaceably, taking the cue from old Daniel, as he always did.

The housekeeper sat down comfortably on a chair.

"Not but what I won't confess," said she, "that saints is no more plenty then than now; and it's a wonder all that does be workin' yet in them old gentlemen that would do better to be studyin' how to make a good end. I think Killaraa himself would sooner see the cattle distemper comin' than Power of Tallat. He's never got over his jockeyin' the handsome Miss Burke away from him and then treatin' her like that when he got her. And then them fields this side of Swanlabar that he tricked him out of. Egg and bird, the luck has always been with Mr. Power."

"God Almighty laves it so for a while, now and again," said the pale woman. "Thrivin' blackguards is as plenty as bees, and them that has religion has often little besides."

"Well, God knows," went on the housekeeper, "them two above never had no religion nor luck either. Look at the poor whinin' thing Mr. Willie got for a wife, the colour of dough and the sighs comin' out of her mouth like the wind out of the keyhole. It'd make a man sick to look at her, and yet a decent poor body in a way. There never was a day I couldn't make her order the dinner twice over, once to please herself and the odd time to please me."

"Ah, and she's there yet," said old Daniel. "And the beautiful strappin' Miss Burke that was the delight of the country gone this fifteen years. Well I mind her! there's not one like her now."

"It was always Killaraa she wanted," said the housekeeper, "and not Tallat at all; and that the two gentlemen knew very well. Ah," she said, lowering her voice to a whisper, "poor old Mr. Willie; his race is near run. It's a wonder to me how I come by the dinner every day. All is gone to wrack and ruin, and he leaves it all at Mr. Power's door. He'd have his life if he could."

"Dear, dear, dear!" sighed the white-haired woman, "and sure isn't it a sin for an ould bald head and an ould white one to go hatin' each other down to the edge of the grave? the snow covers all in winter."

At that moment a bell rang loudly, and the man in livery leapt from the table and ran for his life up a passage.

"It's easy seen there's a master in the house," said the younger of the two old men.

"Troth and there's two!" said the housekeeper. "A pair of tigers. But neither of them dares to look sideways at me, I can tell ye."

The man-servant came back and said:

"Mr. Duffy has a minute for you now. Come this way."

Sheila drew the shawl close around her face, picked up her dog, and with a beating heart followed the man along a dark passage into a long

low room. It was full of guns and whips, riding-boots and foxes' brushes, spurs and bits.

At the table sat a rough-looking man with a broad simple face and whiskers.

Sheila was glad to see him alone, and plucking up her heart went forward to speak to him.

"Sheila McBride, is it?" he said. "Well, indeed, me poor girl, and I'm sorry for ye! A kind decent woman your mother was, and respected by all."

Sheila's voice trembled as she answered:

"Thank you, Mr. Duffy, you're very kind. And, sir, I am come to say that if it is pleasing to you, I am wishful to keep the little place. I can pay the rent regular, for me poor father and mother that's gone have left me well off. And here is a little present, sir, if you would be so kind as to take it," and she laid her little piece of gold on the table.

"Well, but," he said doubtfully, "a little girl like you can't live by herself. Haven't ye got relations that would take ye? And I half promised the little house away on Saturday last, so I did."

As he spoke the door hastily opened and a gentleman came into the room. Duffy rose at once from his seat, and Sheila slightly curtsied, and drew the shawl closer about her face.

Mr. Hawks, or Mr. Willie, as he was always called, stopped short when he saw the figure standing by the table.

"Who have you got here?" he said roughly.

"A young woman, sir, called about one of the

cottages on the Swanlabar mountain. Her father and mother are newly buried, but she says she can pay the rent, and has put down a little earnest-money."

"Oh, said Hawks carelessly, "can she be trusted for it, do you think?"

"She comes of respectable people, sir."

"All right, then," said he, putting the little gold coin in his pocket; "let her stay."

Suddenly Magra, tired of captivity, barked loudly and jumped high in Sheila's arms, the shawl was pulled from her head, and the light fell on her tossed curls and flushed cheek and the handsome golden coat of the dog.

Hitherto Hawks had merely glanced at the serious black-draped figure; now he stepped forward smiling.

"Why, begad," said he, "this is a complete baby: this one can't live by herself. What's here?" he went on familiarly, seizing the pup by the nape of its neck and looking intently in Sheila's face. "As handsome a colley pup as ever I saw, and as good-looking a little girl."

Sheila drew back angrily; her eyes flamed suddenly and her nostrils dilated and quivered.

"Give me back the dog, sir," she said. "I came here on business, by your leave." As she looked at him she hated his face; black-bearded, with a wide smile and great rows of white teeth, bold searching eyes that spoke thoughts that the mouth did not utter.

Sheila's look was so proud and angered that he handed back the dog, smiling widely as he did so.

"Faith," he said, "I've made a mistake; it's a little spitting devil and well able to take care of itself."

In a passion of resentment that struck the colour from her face, Sheila drew the shawl over her head and spoke in a voice that was stern for so young a maiden.

"I wish you good morning, sir. My business is done, and I thank you for your manners to a new-made orphan."

With a very slight curtsey she left the room by the way she had come.

"There's a slap in the face for you," said Hawks, laughing. "That one has spirit. I like her well. What's the name of the cottage, Duffy, and where is it?"

CHAPTER XII

SHEILA'S WASHING

THE day was hot and fine, and Sheila had chosen to do her washing down by the spring. She had lit a fire of sticks and turf, and her pot was on to boil. Near by, curled round in a yellow ball in the sun, lay Magra, while the goat looked on jealously from a mound above. The well itself was grown all about with fern and heather, and a passer might have easily stepped by it and never noticed the four square stones that were its mouth: underneath these the water slept on the hottest summer day, cold as ice and honey-sweet.

Nora O'Hea had come over the hill for purposes of friendship, and she was by way of helping Sheila with the washing. For the moment the two girls were resting from the heat. They sat side by side under an old thorn-tree, looking over the country that stretched away below them.

Nora was a strapping girl; she had black hair and red cheeks that might be seen from far, and anyone could tell that she had money from the way she held herself, with her chin up and her head on one side. She wore a scarlet gown and a necklace

of pearls about her neck, though there was no reason that could be told for any grandeur at all.

By her side Sheila looked another creature, serious and simple in her short straight gown. And their looks did not differ more than their thoughts, for Sheila's were pure and fresh as the mountain wind, while Nora's were a fine match for her clothes.

The sky above them was high-arched and very blue. From the centre of it the sun poured down hot streams of light that lit up the green country till woods and lanes and broad fields were all clear and distinct to be seen. Sheila was content to sit and gaze in a natural delight; but Nora's eye only saw the scattered brown and white farms, dotted here and there in the valley below: to her they were only points from which there might start forth possible bachelors, drawn like moths to the flame by the splendour of her red cheeks and handsome attire.

Sheila knew nothing of what was in her companion's mind: as she sat under the thorn-tree she was watching the air quivering in glassy waves above and around the fire.

"I wonder now," said she, "why it does be doin' that. You can't see the air only when there's a fire. But listen to me till I tell you this, Nora: one day a while back I saw the wind. It was hot as hot in the night, and in the morning early the wind began to blow a storm, and I went to get a breath of air outside of the house, and when I got

up the boreen there I saw three winds as plain as could be: one goin' up and one comin' down and one sideways that nearly drove me off me feet."

"What are ye talkin' of, ye silly stookaun?" said Nora. "As well say ye can see the angels by daylight. I don't think, Sheila, ye'll ever get sense. I'm wastin' me time with ye, so I am."

"Go along, then, and look if the water's boilin', and that's sense, isn't it?" said Sheila.

Nora crossed over obediently.

"Not a boil on it," she said, coming back. Her head was running on young men, and she was bursting with a desire to relieve herself in confidences.

"Sheila," she began mysteriously, "ye'd never think what happened yesterday."

"What was that?" said Sheila absently.

Nora suddenly doubled herself over and broke into a hysterical giggle.

"Ah musha!" she said. "The impidence of men! The things they do be sayin'! Sheila, did ever ye see Mr. Mylotte?"

"No," said Sheila, "but I've heard of him. I've lived wonderful lonely up here on the hill, Nora; not like other girls: I've hardly seen a living soul."

"He's a grand gentleman, Sheila. He wears shooting-clothes, and a nose on him like a hawk. He comes every night to the paddock wall and tells me I'm a beauty. He thinks mother don't know, but she knows right enough. I keep her

there behind a bush, to fear him if he comes over. I'm not going to make a fool of meself if I know it, Sheila. But how he does talk! The long words and the grandeur of him! I swear to meself I'll remember them things he says to me, but my memory can't hould them at all. Diamonds and jet and roses and the voice of a swan; them's the least kind of things he talks about. Never did you hear such language." And Nora laughed again and blushed all over her handsome face. "And the worst of it is," she went on, "there's three others, farmers they are, comes courtin' to the garden gate; and every evening I do be in a fever thinking maybe one of them will thravel the wrong road or come the wrong time. But sure not one of them has any conversation but Mr. Mylotte; the two young ones just gape over the gate at me, and James Dolan, who's not that young, lays hold of his red whiskers and lets on he wants to know about the new yellow cow. But all the while he's lookin' at me with the tail of his eyes and considerin' me little bit of money in his heart. But oh, Sheila, for all that young Shanly can't get a word out of him and stands like a sheep, yet I could never be tired of lookin' at him, for he's a galliant boy."

"Is there any more of them?" said Sheila, going over and lifting her heavy pot off the fire. "There's one you like to be lookin' at and one you like to be talkin' to and two that's foolish entirely."

"There's plenty more," said Nora, "would I give meself the trouble of a wink."

"If I were you," said Sheila, going on with her washing, "I'd endeavour to be doin' with them four, or even with less."

But Nora was not listening; she tittered and blushed and rocked herself as she sat under the tree.

Smiles were flying over Sheila's face too, as with rapid movements she washed and twisted and wrung the clothes.

"You're a beautiful washerwoman, Nora," she said presently.

Nora jumped up and came over good-naturedly to take her turn at the wringing. Suddenly, as they were spreading linen and homespun over the warm heather, a shout startled them. The pup woke up and barked as two men with setters at their heels came quickly down the hill from the point where the rise of the brow hid Sheila's cottage from sight.

"There, now!" said Nora in a delighted whisper. "If it isn't after me they're comin'!"

The first to reach the well-side was Peter Mylotte, who, after a glance at the younger girl, went forward and seized Nora's hand.

"Well, my dear," said he, "here's a merry meeting! Look at her, Willie. Isn't she a beauty?"

"Which of 'em?" said Hawks; then, without staying for an answer, he turned towards Sheila, and "See here, Mylotte," he said, "this is the little

girl. She's far and away too young to live by herself, isn't she? She'd better be where she can get a little company; eh, my pet?"

Sheila made as though she did not hear, going quietly on with her business.

Hawks went up and lightly touched her on the shoulder. Sheila started round and looked him full in the face.

"I ask your pardon," she said; "and is it to me you were speaking?"

"I was only asking you," he answered coolly, but still ever so little abashed, "if I could help you to do the washing? Let's see, now; is this the way you do it?" And pretending to lend a hand, in a minute he had kicked over the tub.

Mylotte burst into a roar of laughter, in which Nora, after a moment's hesitation, joined as well.

"Begad," said Hawks, looking round with a smile and showing his white teeth, "that's funny! I'm sorry, my pet. Don't cry, now," he went on, looking at Sheila's white face. "You shan't do any more washing, I promise you. Never fret for the tub, my jewel. I'll pick it up for you, if you'll only give me a kiss."

"If you please, sir," said Sheila steadily, "I will be very thankful to you if you will go away to your home, and let me be. My mother is gone, and I am in trouble and grief."

At the sound of her voice her young dog crept up beside her and lay down over her feet. Nora

began to feel troubled and ceased her giggling. "Ah now, Mr. Hawks!" she said, and "Let her alone, Willie," said Mr. Mylotte.

"Oh, come now, this isn't fair," said Hawks in affected indignation. "Haven't I come here specially to cheer her up? Aren't I doing all in my power to comfort her? And she shows me nothing but ingratitude. Come now, my dear," he said with an ugly look, approaching Sheila where she had drawn away to Nora's side. Suddenly they were all startled by a piercing whistle, long and shrill.

They turned at once to see Mick-a-Dandy standing on the slope above them, looking down towards Tallat as he drew out the whistle on his fingers. The head of his cur was just visible in the distance, watching the red setters with memory in his eyes.

"Here, hullo!" shouted Hawks. "Stop that confounded noise."

Mick-a-Dandy came down slowly. His mouth was open and his expression completely wooden.

Sheila ran forward and took his hand.

"Oh, Mick-a-Dandy," she said, "Indeed and I'm glad to see you."

"Good day to you, Sheila," said Mick-a-Dandy, looking at her with a faint gleam of tenderness in his eyes; then turning to the company, he made a leg.

"What were you up to with that whistle, Mick-a-Dandy, eh?"

"I humbly ask your pardon," said Mick-a-Dandy, "it's a small little brown wran that knows me, down beyant among the trees. He's that sensible he'll come from anny distance within screech of me whistle. I've been in the town on an arrand for Miss Sheila, and, Sheila dear, every haporth of your orders is about me, or near as I could remember them. I'm very dry, Miss Sheila, and if the honourable gentry will excuse me, I'll take a drink of the blessed water, for the sun is hot."

Sheila fetched him a tin dipper, while Hawks threw himself down in the shelter of the thorn.

"Look at that, Mr. Mylotte," said Nora. "Mick-a-Dandy is Sheila's friend. They talk for hours together, and what they talk about the dear knows, for I don't."

"The Lord reward you, Sheila," said Mick-a-Dandy aloud. "The water is wonderful sweet and cold. Now," he went on, "if the noble gentlemen will have patience, I will show all I got in the town."

"No, no; be off with you, Mick-a-Dandy," said Hawks roughly. "We don't want to hear your adventures."

"Anan, yer honour?" said Mick-a-Dandy, with an idiotic stare. "Sure there's no harm in them; and bedad that's more than yer honour could say at all, at all."

Mylotte laughed. "Very true, Mick-a-Dandy," said he.

"Well, Sheila dear," went on Mick-a-Dandy,

"as I was tellin' ye, I done the best I could, and the things is all upon me, and with the blessing of God I'll come at them one by one. I'm terribly slow," he said, turning to the company, "and some days I do be more foolish than others."

"You needn't tell us that, Mick-a-Dandy," said Nora. "We know you well enough."

"Arrah, Miss! do ye now?" said he. "Well, if there's others that know me, it's the mercy of God I know meself. And it isn't every fool in a red coat has as much sense as that."

Hawks and Mylotte looked at each other, and Nora bit her lips and tossed her head.

"Miss Sheila dear," went on Mick-a-Dandy unconcernedly, drawing a package with some difficulty from a full pocket, "here's the first-fruits of me arrand. And tay is down. Mrs. Hannan tould me to tell ye ye'd have the advantage of tuppence in every pound over yer poor mother that's now in glory. So there's the good news to rise up yer heart, and tuppence back out of yer half-a-crown."

"Keep them, Mick-a-Dandy, for your trouble," cried Sheila.

"God bless you, avourneen! Always from your cradle you have had the kind heart, and Mary herself shall attend ye!"

"Go on, Mick-a-Dandy!" said Mylotte. "Let her have a better twopenny worth of blessings. He'll promise you anything for money, Willie. Twopence will fetch you half-a-dozen saints for

your comforters, and a bed in paradise is cheap with him at sixpence."

"Ah, then, yer honour is kind to say so," said Mick-a-Dandy innocently. "Sure there's plenty in this parish and the next that would do worse for money than let out a few blessings out of their mouths, not to spake of robbin' a poor man and deludherin' a young woman that hasn't got the sense."

Mylotte looked black and half raised his cane, and Mick-a-Dandy grinned and started back with an elbow jerked up to shield his face.

Nora, who had begun to feel herself too little noticed, now came forward to Sheila. "It's time I was gone home, Sheila," she said. "My mother will be raising the country after me." Then, lowering her voice she whispered, "Never heed the gentleman, Sheila; it's only his fun. And, anyway, once I'm gone, he won't be long after."

"Good day to you, Miss Nora, honey," said Mick-a-Dandy as she turned away, "ye have a handsome face, and that yer head may save yer heart."

"Are you coming, Willie?" called Mylotte. "I am going to walk over the hill to Lisadyne with Miss O'Hea."

"I'll overtake you," said Hawks, as he still lay under the thorn.

"Well, Sheila dear," went on Mick-a-Dandy, "if you will please to pardon me, I'll sit upon the ground, for I'm weary with the road. There's a

half a small sack of flour comin' for you the morrow's morn with James Molloy's little black ass: a wonderful lot of money I paid for that, Sheila, and the paper of it is in me pocket."

With many groans and much parade of fumbling Mick-a-Dandy took a variety of parcels from his pockets, which he arranged along the bank beside him, using each article as the text of an elaborate discourse.

There was half a pound of meat and a packet of hairpins for one housekeeper; a bottle of medicine and an ounce of tobacco for another; toffee for a child, a paper of onion-seed, and many other small matters. All these commissions he carried in his head and executed without a mistake. It was hard to say where the man's weakness of brain lay. Some of the gentlefolk said that he shammed, but the peasant people were kinder and more acute in their judgment.

"Mick-a-Dandy is in fear to-day," they would say; "he feels the hand of God upon him."

It was as though at times a cloud descended upon his mind, whose coming he feared beforehand, as a child fears the dark.

To-day, however, his manœuvres were exactly fitted to their purpose. As he sat there innocently making out the natural history of each separate package, Hawks, seeing no end to the proceeding, leaped to his feet.

"I'll say good-bye to you now, little madam," he said somewhat roughly, "and come again an-

other day. Mick-a-Dandy, I owe you one for this, and I sometimes pay my debts."

"Anan, yer honour!" said Mick-a-Dandy, getting up and staring helplessly.

"Damn you!" said Hawks, aiming a vicious blow at him with his walking-stick, which he safely ducked.

Then going over to Sheila, "Good-bye, my dear," he said, and then suddenly took a quick step and seized her by the arm.

Simultaneously with Sheila's cry of indignation came a shout from below, and in a moment Michael Power, in his flannel shirt and corduroys, dashed forward and hit Hawks a sounding smack upon the cheek with flat hand.

Hawks staggered back. Michael stood with his hand forward, a fierce scowl upon his face, his heavy fists clenched and hanging down, himself overmatching in height and breadth the man that stood before him.

Hawks recovered himself slowly. "Well," he said at last indistinctly, "this is an ugly piece of business. You—you dirty lout, I'll have you praying on your knees for this before I'm much older; and as for you," he said thickly, turning to Sheila, "you little —."

"Shut your mouth," said Michael loudly.

"Well and good," said Hawks; "I'll not give you the satisfaction of fighting, the pair of you; but take care of yourself, my fine chap: I'll give you and your lot cause to remember this day."

CHAPTER XIII

BY THE WELL

As Hawks slowly withdrew, Michael remained in the same attitude, quivering with passion, like a hound straining on a leash.

Sheila cast herself on the bank and buried her face in her hands. But Mick-a-Dandy leaped up and danced and snapped his fingers in an ecstasy.

"Slainte!" he cried. "Mait an buacaill! The ould blood! the ould blood! Musha, ye gev it him right in the face! Let him go home and nurse his jaw! The white-hearted, black-faced dog! Shame to the mother that reared him! Troth, Mick-a-Dandy's brown wran has cooked his goose for him this time. Ah, Master Michael darlin', but ye did that grand!"

Michael laughed out and turned on his heel; his face changed and his muscles relaxed, and after a glance at Sheila, he went up to Mike-a-Dandy and shook him by the hand.

"I'll be off now on me travels," said Mick-a-Dandy, "and glad I am I came here first instead of going round by Widow Leary's. There was the copper-headed gentleman here wid the other play-

boy when I come, but I made fine fools of them with the bit of meat and the tobacca and the Widdy's bottle. Didn't I do it grand, Miss Sheila? (Is she takin' on, Master Michael?) Never break your heart for it, alanna!" he said, pausing and gazing kindly at her with a troubled look on his strange face. "Sure isn't there a whole army of saints and angels about ye this minute, not to speak of Michael Power?"

But Sheila never lifted her head; and Mick-a-Dandy, feeling himself quenched, turned away and began filling up his pockets with his scattered goods. In doing this he was interfered with by his dog, the Colonel, who, having seen the gentlemen out of sight, had come out of his hiding. In his joy at finding himself with his master again, he lay down on the bank, and worked himself about on his back among the parcels, with joy and affection beaming from his eyes.

When Mick-a-Dandy was gone at last, Michael walked up and down by the well, waiting till Sheila should have conquered her distress.

It was near a week since he had seen her, but all that time the image of her had been his companion day and night. Whenever he could contrive it he escaped by himself to wander in the Tallat woods. There he became like a man blind and deaf, for the eyes of his mind were turned inward. In his fancy, Sheila moved to and fro; sometimes trees were about her and sometimes the noise of the river, and sometimes she was on the mountain-side. He

watched her light movements: every curl of her hair was plain to him; he caught the shining clearness of her eyes and even the busy sound of her breath. Most wonderful of all, there was no waywardness in this other Sheila: did he but will it, that light figure must pause in its race and come forward to his side; eye and hand and lip must wait upon him, and the beloved maiden move and speak obedient to his thought.

A thousand meetings he had had with her in this wise, and now his chance had fallen out far otherwise than as he dreamed.

Most pitifully he looked on Sheila's distress: every now and then she was shaken by a vehement sobbing, and Michael turned away his eyes that he might not witness her trouble.

Presently Sheila sat up on the bank, her head hanging down, her cheeks like a pale rose-leaf, wet with tears.

"Michael," she said slowly: "I think I will go now to old Theresa."

"Rest yourself a minute, Sheila," said Michael compassionately. "You're tired now. Have you got a kettle in the place? I'll make ye a cup of tea in a minute. What sent the tub over, Sheila?"

"Mr. Willie Hawks did it to annoy me," she said in a bitter voice. Then standing up and laying her hand upon her bosom,

"Ah, Michael," she said, "what in the world will I do without my mother now?" and fresh tears fell from her eyes.

"I cannot bear to see you cry, Sheila," said Michael in distress. "Dry your cheeks and tell me your trouble, and I will be a kind friend to you."

"But I cannot speak to you the same as to a mother," said Sheila in a low voice. "But oh, Michael, I have no one at all and—and indeed I don't know what to do. I cannot tell you," she went on, wringing her hands, as she walked up and down, "what I feel. I would be glad to die and hide myself. I feel shame and trouble and anger, great anger, Michael."

She turned away and hid her face, her heart struggling within her.

"And so do I," said Michael grimly after a pause, and picking up the tub. "'Tis better for you not to fret. Come here now and gather up the clothes."

Sheila did as she was bid. Michael threw fresh sticks on the fire and set a kettle on them.

"Have ye got a pair of cups in the world? Run up now to the house and bring down all that's wanted."

As Sheila went up the hill, her head still hanging and her bosom heaving, Michael turned to look after her.

The look of tender pity in his face gave way to a heavy scowl, and lifting up his fist to heaven he said,

"The damned coward! God do so to me and more, too, if I don't pay for every tear ten blows!"

Sheila was a while gone, and when she came

down her step was quicker and her face was bright again. Michael had cleared away everything that was likely to remind her of what had passed, and he had hidden the tub among the fern.

When the kettle boiled, Sheila made the tea, and served Michael with a ready courtesy; the spot looked once again familiar and homelike, and happiness began to fall around them like the sunlight.

Magra woke up again and began his play: he worried the clothes among the heather, and many times Sheila must get up to carry him back.

"He's a wonderful comfort to me, Michael," she said thankfully, "and getting that fond of me. I have a basket there above for him to sleep, and, if you'll believe me, he gets up in the night to kiss my face."

"I can aisy believe you, Sheila," answered Michael earnestly: "but, indeed," he went on, "he's no kind of protection to you. If he was a big dog, now! But it'll be three months and more before he'll be of anny use."

"It's true," said Sheila sadly. "The white goat has more sense in her this minute."

"I don't like to be offending your feelings, Sheila, and if your mother was here, it's to her I'd go. But now it's to you I must be speaking, Sheila. Has that man annoyed you before to-day?"

"Only once, Michael," said Sheila, hanging down her head. "And that was the only time I ever saw him before to-day. And then, Michael," she said, lifting up her head and looking at him

with large innocent eyes, "I spoke to him that wicked, you'd think he'd have been afraid for his life to come near me."

"Well now, look at that," said Michael meditatively.

"But, Michael, I will tell you," she went on. "I have a great fear of him. Maybe it's his teeth. Or his eyes with the black lights upon them. Only last night, Michael, I had a dream. I thought I was above in the little house, sitting on the ground, close up again the wall by the door, shaking with fear like a mouse: and the place was dark enough, for the curtain was drawn on the little window, but the sun came in very bright over the half-door and, Michael, there was himself leanin' on it, and turning his head slow round in the sun to look. And there were his teeth to be seen, and every hair in his beard shining like wires. And as I was making myself small again the wall for fear he should see me, I woke up and it was long before the fright left me. For, Michael, it was more plain than daylight to me, and I said to myself, 'Such dreams are sent, and that man will harm you yet,' and then when I saw him to-day standing there on the hill, I thought it only the more."

"Well, Sheila," said Michael after a moment's pause, "that dream came to you for a warnin'. And now listen to me: never again must you sleep the night alone there in your little house. If you will do it, then I must spend the night on the bare mountain—and so surely as I find that man upon

this hill, so surely will there be murder done. But take advice, Sheila: go you now to old Theresa, and sleep there every night, and come again in the morning to your own place."

"Maybe I will, Michael, but indeed I do not like it. Theresa's house is dirty, and mine is sweet and clean, and Theresa will talk all night into my ear, and I don't want to hear a word she says."

"There is no need for you to listen, Sheila. You can be saying your prayers. Tell me now that you will go, or I spend this night upon the hill."

"I will go, Michael," said Sheila gently, the tears coming fresh to her eyes, "and I thank you for your kindness to an orphan girl."

Then Michael rose up to go.

"Good night, Sheila," he said, for the day had worn away towards evening, and Sheila's bees were coming home.

"Good night, Michael," she answered. "May you go safe."

"Maybe," he said, half turning. "You'll be down at the river to-morrow?"

"Maybe so," she said softly.

"Well, good night," he said again, "and a blessing with you." Then he went silently down the hill, and Sheila stood by the well in the slanting sunlight and watched him go.

CHAPTER XIV

FATHER AND SON

JOHN POWER was sitting in state in his own hall, as he did every night in summer time. In knee-breeches and buckled shoes, with a waistcoat as white as his own hair, he sat up stiffly at the head of his table, and Gunyon, his old servant, in blue livery and silver buttons, waited behind him.

The linen cloth had been cleared away, and on the polished table stood tall branched candlesticks. The light of the candles sparkled on ancient silver flagons and stands of costly glass; in the centre of the table stood late roses, yellow and red, for John Power sat to his meals like a gentleman.

To-night his mind was uneasy.

"Hot water, Gunyon," he said, and brewed for himself another tumbler of punch.

"Gunyon, how long is it since I took those fields at Swanlabar off Mr. Hawks at the cards?"

"Twenty years to-night, sir. They were speaking of it in the kitchen just now, sir."

"Mrs. Power was here that time, Gunyon."

"Ah, sir, she was! and a beautiful lady she looked, too!"

"She wasn't best pleased that night, Gunyon."

"No, sir. I can mind her standing up by the mantel-shelf in her silk gown, and her face as white as a sheet and the young gentleman in her hand."

"Michael would be about five years old then; eh, Gunyon?"

"Ay, sir, and the mistress had him dressed like a young lord in velvet and lace, and a most beautiful child he looked, and that fond of the mistress, and she of him. She kept him very grand dressed —when she could think of it, sir."

Gunyon was always very careful in his speech: there was a line drawn between him and his master beyond which he never stepped. He knew all the secrets of every house in the countryside, and all the criticisms of his own class that were for ever busied about these private histories.

For five-and-twenty years Power had been tantalised by his knowledge of this fact, and for five-and-twenty years he had hovered on the verge of a confidence which his pride had never permitted him to make.

But he was nearer it to-night than ever he had been before. There was a bodily and a mental disease upon him, and he moved often upon his chair. Even while his old servant had been speaking, he saw his dead wife again as clearly as in a picture—the wild wife who had never returned his love; who had gone to and fro in his house with every thought against him. He had revenged himself steadily since then on her son, but his heart had

never healed of its wound, and for ever troubled him.

After a moody silence, he spoke again.

"Did you keep back William and Donovan from going to the races, Gunyon?"

"Ay, sir. They warn't very pleased, but I told them you were particular, sir."

"Are they there in the kitchen now?"

"Yes, sir; they are, sir: sittin' in a dumb sulk."

"Is Michael there?"

"He's above, sir. He's very quiet, sir. I think there's something workin' him, sir."

"Let it work, then," said Mr. Power. "What time is it on the clock, Gunyon?"

"It wants fifteen minutes of nine, sir."

Power moved again restlessly.

"Do you recollect what happened old Mr. Mansfielde of Dromore, Gunyon?"

"Rightly, sir: he was shot in his own dining-room. Sir William Irwin took offence at the way he played his cards, and went out into the hall, quiet-like, and got his pistol out of his great-coat pocket and shot him dead."

"No one ever said a word to Sir William for it, did they, Gunyon?"

"Not a word, sir. Sure, wasn't he a magistrate and on the grand jury and all?"

"Well, Gunyon, it was a pity that Mr. Mansfielde hadn't a faithful servant to make a small examination of those pockets, and do something to that pistol."

Gunyon paused a moment, and looked attentively at his master.

"Maybe you're expecting visitors to-night, sir?" he asked cautiously.

"Ay, am I," said Power morosely; then after a pause, "There's mighty little velvet and lace on Master Michael to-night, Gunyon?"

"Not a rag, sir," he answered with an impassive countenance.

"Have him down, Gunyon; have him down: he shall sit to table with me."

In a minute or two Michael entered the room; his face was pale and of a fine expression. He wore his rough suit of worn working clothes, but there was careful cleanliness to be noticed in his person.

Power pushed out his chair, crossed his legs and leaned back.

"Come on, Michael," he called, "come on and sit to table and drink a glass of punch. Come on, I tell you," he said loudly as Michael hesitated. "A glass of hot water for Mr. Michael, Gunyon."

Then, leaning back in his chair, he watched Michael with a grim smile as he seated himself slowly and hesitatingly at the table.

"Your clothes are very bad with you, me boy. Is that the best ye've got?"

"Yes, sir," said Michael, galled and flushing.

"You've had a fine life of it here at Tallat, Michael," he said; "like a bee in a churn, eh, me boy?"

"Exactly, sir," said Michael, looking full at him.

"Did ever you think why, now?"

"Many and many a day," said Michael.

"Well," said Power, squaring his shoulders and smiling, "the fact is, I wanted to do your mother a nasty turn, me boy; but I'm sorely afraid sometimes that it's all thrown away upon her where she lies."

"I should say so," said Michael with tight lips, looking down at his glass.

"That will do, Gunyon," said Power; then leaning his arms on the table, he spoke in a low tone, his face dark with an unnatural red, and one hand at his shirt-collar.

"Look here, Michael. Maybe I've been hard upon you, but I had provocation. I never was an easy-tempered man, and your mother hated me. I married her against her will, and she was like an adder in my bosom. And there she'd be, nursing and coddling you, and when I'd come near she'd look at me sideways as if I was some filthy toad. That would make a man mad, Michael."

Michael looked up. The flush on his father's face had deepened. A new thought struck him.

"Did you care about her, sir?" he asked suddenly.

"Care about her?" he said hoarsely. "I'd have gone to hell for the least lock of her hair. And it was another man she wanted all the time. But I had my will, as I always do and always shall. Hark!" In the deep stillness the sound of horses' hoofs on the avenue was plainly to be heard.

"By God!" he said, "here they are. Is it friends or foes between us, Michael? These Hawks are coming here to-night, because they think every man but Gunyon is at the races. Willie the Devil is about done, as ye know. He's come to his last hole like a rat, and like a rat he'll bite. Now will you stand by me, Michael?"

"Yes, sir," said Michael.

Power paused in the midst of his deep excitement.

"Do you hate me, boy?" he said.

"Well," said Michael slowly, "now and again, but not to-night."

"Your hand on it," said Power, and as they clasped hands across the table the hoofs of the horses were trampling by the door.

CHAPTER XV

THE CARD-PARTY

"WHAT'S that?" said Power, listening: "the blackguards are going round to the yard. They think they have me. Ring the bell, Michael."

Gunyon had evidently been waiting at the door, for he entered instantly.

"Gunyon," he said, "send William and Donovan out to take those gentlemen's horses."

"They're gone, sir. I heard the noise of them coming over the Fore Meadow."

"Right. Gunyon, you don't leave the room tonight; and if I tell you to go, you can just go outside and come back again, you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"And, Gunyon, just look about you for anything of the kind we were mentioning."

"The weather's a bit too fine for great-coats, sir."

"So it is. Well, keep your eyes open. And see here, Gunyon, show them in handsomely, will you?"

"The back way? Certainly, sir."

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"Sit to the table, sit to the table, Michael. If there was time, I'd put a good coat and trousers on ye; but you're a bigger man than ever I was, though you go slouching. You're a bigger man than young Hawks and more than his match, I should think."

"I had occasion to give him a slap in the face last week," said Michael, "and I fancy it rattled his teeth for him. I heard he'd been to see Mr. Kavanagh about them."

"I'm delighted to hear it," said Power, emphasising each word. "And what did you do that for? Here they are, lad, here they are. Damn them, they're making noise enough. Draw in, draw in and fill your glass. Here's to your health and a better fortune to you."

The door opened, and in a sonorous voice, adding a bow to each name, Gunyon announced:

"Mr. Hawks of Killaraa, Mr. Willie Hawks, Mr. Mylotte of Upper Grange."

Old Hawks came first at a stumbling trot into the room. His head was bald and shining, his eyes black and very bright; he wore a short beard, white, with one singular heavy black streak on the left side. His manner was uproarious, and Power, rising from his seat, met him with a frowning countenance. The other two men were talking loudly behind.

"How d'ye do, Power, how d'ye do?" he shouted. "You're looking well: putting on condition, eh? Thought I'd look in as I was passing.

Haven't seen the place for twenty years, and, gad, I don't believe there's a stick altered. We haven't been very good neighbours, but we'll change all that. Who's this chap in the waistcoat, eh?"

"My son, sir; my son, sir," said Power stiffly.

"Jupiter!" said Hawks, "d'ye tell me so? I heard you kept him low, but, 'pon my honour, he's own cousin to a scarecrow as he stands. Ha, ha, ha!" and he laughed boisterously. Then suddenly changing his tone to a sanctimonious snuffle: "Dear, dear! what would his poor mother say to him? I recollect her very well, Power. Dead, isn't she, since, poor thing? What sort of stuff have ye got here?" he said, going over to the table and lifting up a decanter.

Power pulled himself together, and said in a bland voice that came from a painfully heaving chest:

"Glasses, Gunyon. Sit down, gentlemen, and help yourselves."

As they seated themselves, Hawks went on talking loudly:

"Ah, well, this is like old times, Power. We'll have a hand at whist presently, eh?"

The whole party took no more notice of Michael than if he were a besom-pole. He was drawing aside when his father called out to him:

"Sit down, Michael; sit down, I say."

"'Pon my honour," said young Hawks, "it'll be the first time that ever I sat down to table with such a cut of corduroys."

"What's that you said, sir?" said Power fiercely, leaning forward.

"Never heed him, never heed him," said old Hawks. "He said, 'Curse the noise!' That's what he said." And the three men laughed.

Old Power looked round him slowly.

"This is my house, gentlemen," he said, speaking with difficulty. "It has always been my custom to show hospitality to my guests. I have never been obliged, that I can remember, to kick a man out at my own door. Help yourselves, gentlemen, help yourselves. Gunyon, let William and Donovan be ready to bring in the card-table."

"You'll allow a man to smoke, Mr. Power, I suppose?" said young Hawks, taking out and filling, as he spoke, a light-coloured meerschaum pipe.

Power took no notice of him.

Michael remained seated in his chair, leaning back with his hands in his pockets, his pale face intent upon the company. Hawks and Mylotte were his neighbours at the table, and both men kept openly edging away, till a wide space was left on either side of him. Mylotte drank steadily glass after glass of whiskey.

"You've no objection to a rubber, eh, Power?" said Hawks. "You promised me my revenge whenever I cared to look for it. I'm like a fly round a honey-pot: I come back and back, and I'm stuck every time. The luck's always been with you. But who knows but it'll turn yet?"

"We'll see that, sir," said Power. "If you want

your revenge, I'll let you have it. It's not the first time I've done so. Gunyon, the tables."

Gunyon touched the bell, and two stout fellows, one in a groom's livery, came into the room. They wheeled the large centre-table aside, and set out a card-table, on the four corners of which Gunyon placed four silver candlesticks, and a pack of cards and markers on the centre baize. They cut for partners, and, as it fell out, Power and Mylotte sat down to play against father and son. In the cross-light of the tall candles the face of the elder Hawks was seen to be crowded with fine wrinkles. But his bright black eyes seemed like the eyes of a young man.

Michael was watching his father, whose bearing was far different from ordinary. His chest laboured with each breath, and his face was deeply coloured and looked strange under his white hair.

"What sort of a game will you give me?" said Hawks. "I've had a rough day and would like to make a quick finish. Shall we say ten-pound points, and the fields of Swanlabar against my townland of Ardra on the rubber?"

"Done!" said Power; "but you're a fool." And the deal fell to young Hawks.

"Glass of whiskey, Gunyon," called Mylotte.

Gunyon brought it, and Mylotte tossed it off.

Power looked at him and said nothing.

At first they played steadily and quietly. Power took nearly all the tricks and won the first hand. Then Michael, who was watching the game, saw a

glance of intelligence pass between the three men.

"Glass of whiskey, Gunyon," called Mylotte again.

"I wish the chap in the waistcoat would move off a bit," said young Hawks casually, as he played his card. "Stables are all very fine in their place, but I don't like 'em after dinner."

"It's thirty years since we had our first big game," said Hawks to Power, who was looking furiously around and playing at random, barely restrained by the strong laws of hospitality from an outbreak. "Thirty years, if I remember rightly. It was very different game we were after then, and, faith, you made the bag. You talk of my being a fool, Power; but who was the fool then, eh? It was a bitter bad bargain you got. Gad! she had a separate spite against every hair on your head. It was a treat to see her look at you."

"Here's a trump for your ace, man," he went on as he played his card. His brilliant black eyes watched Power boldly and vindictively across the table. In them was all the vitality of youth, but age had shaken his hands so that the cards he held kept up a continual trembling. Between the two old men hung the shadow of an ancient hatred, that wore to-night the shape of the wild and beautiful woman for whose sake they had fought so long.

"Game!" called young Hawks, and they marked it up.

As they played the first hand, Power pulled himself together.

"Gunyon," he called, "take that glass of whiskey from Mr. Mylotte: he's revoking."

Gunyon warily approached, but Mylotte was too quick for him. He had a head as hard as iron underneath that skull cap of gleaming copper, but just now it suited his purpose to appear overtaken. Mylotte was a man who always sat on the fence when any quarrel was going on; when he happened to have any private quarrel of his own, he never pounced unless he could do so with safety.

Now he set down the empty tumbler and said solemnly: "Glass of whiskey, Gunyon. Partner, I held only one card of that suit, and it didn't suit me to play it."

Power leaned back in his chair, and glared about him like an angry lion.

"Three rogues," he said, "and a put-up job." He rose from his seat, swaying slightly, a light foam at the corners of his mouth. He raised his hand to cast his cards in Hawk's face; but even as the other's hand stole to his breast-pocket Power's face changed and his fingers slackened, till the cards fell in a shower upon the floor. Across the candle-flames, and against the dark wall, he had caught sight of a pale face, seeming to his sick brain but too well known, that came towards him into the light.

It was Michael, but Power threw up his arms with a loud cry of "Jane! Jane!" and tottered and wavered on his feet. The men stood hastily up from their chairs, and when Power saw Hawk's

frightened face staring into his own, he laughed aloud.

"Ah, Willie, me boy," he said, "you may play on to all eternity, but I had her, man, I had her!" And he fell heavily upon the floor.

Gunyon screamed liked a woman; but Michael in a moment ran round and took his father's head upon his knee, while a silent death-struggle went on.

Old Hawks knelt down beside them, and, seeing the distorted face, burst into tears and sobs.

"Ah, Johnny, Johnny, hold up, for God's sake!" he said, and took the clenched hand into his own. "Johnny, me boy, hold up for the love of God; we've had grand fighting, but we'll be friends from this out!"

But John Power was going. He had piled sin upon sin and now went, a strong man, to his account.

The long battle between him and his proved enemy was over; for when old Hawks turned to the door to ride for help, it was with a heart that grieved sorely for the friend of his boyhood.

But the ancient hatred appeared with an uglier malice in the eyes of his son, as he paused in the doorway to look back on the new Master of Tallat, dressed in his corduroy clothes.

CHAPTER XVI

SPOLLIN'S ADVICE

NEXT morning at early dawn Michael stood out on the lawn meadow in front of the house of Tallat. His eyes were tired with watching, and his air was heavy and sombre.

He was full of consternation. The yoke he had borne was a heavy one, and now that it was lifted from off his shoulders, he staggered in his going.

The night had been wild and strange. Outside the hounds had filled the air with howls and frantic whining. Within the women servants had kept up a hurrying to and fro, and a whispering that now and then broke out into wails. Old Gunyon had fallen down in a faint and lain for hours insensible as his master.

John Power had ruled so long and so hard that there was not a soul in the house that could go alone. If the building itself had fallen about the ears of his people, they could not have been more aghast.

Michael, as he sat by his dead father, scarce heard the words that were spoken about him,

he stared before him into vacancy, slowly pondering on that awful change.

His was a nature at once strong and deep,—apt to receive broad impressions that sank slowly into his mind. As he sat there, no ignominious feeling disturbed him: he was overwhelmed by the weight of the mere human catastrophe, the horror of so sudden an end.

But all through his trouble he had been conscious of some beautiful appealing thought in his inmost soul, like a star that shines steadily in a heavy sky.

So it was that, when morning dawned, he went slowly down the echoing stairs, suffering himself to be led by his longing for the comfort of Sheila's presence.

At the foot of the stairs he paused: never in his life had he gone out by the front door. No, he thought; nor yet would he do so now—not till he walked out there to do honour to his father's last going from home.

The crowded kitchen had fallen silent as he passed down the long passage, and without a word he hastened out and round to the front meadow.

Now, as he lifted his face to the freshness of the morning, his father's words returned to him: "Here's to your health, me boy, and a better fortune to you!"

Now these woods and meadows, ay, and the distant farms, were his fortune, and he without knowledge or manners.

As he stood and gazed abroad, he slowly lifted himself up and a silent resolve formed itself within him. He would make himself as a child, that he might get knowledge and wisdom. He had searched heaven and the bare chapel walls to find the Almighty, and in vain. Now he would follow the voice that spoke and declared the Almighty will in his own heart. Standing there, he vowed himself to love mercy and do justice among the people at whose side he had worked and the weight of whose burdens he knew.

Never could he feel and say, as overlords do, that his was a finer flesh and a higher mind than theirs. The earth had drunk of his sweat in summer as of theirs, and the winter winds had drawn the same heat from his long labours. In the slow evenings the same weariness had pulled down his chin upon his breast.

As he stood revolving these thoughts a loud cough startled him.

He looked up, and there was Spollin, the old herd, hat in hand, and shaking his white locks.

"Good morrow to your honour," he said. "This is a sad mornin' for us at Tallat."

Michael flushed: the title of respect and the altered manner took him by surprise. Many was the pitying kindness he had had from Spollin.

"You may well say so," said Michael gravely.

"Ah, to think of it!" said Spollin, rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand. "He was a noble gentleman up to the last. He was as wicked as a

horned bull with me only yesterday. But we none of us minded his tempers—not a hate. Sure, wasn't he the master? Ah, now, there wasn't one of us thought to see ye standin' in his shoes. We thought he'd wear ye out, so we did. And we hope you'll excuse the disrespect and continue us in your service."

Michael crossed over and shook the old man by the hand.

"To be sure, Spollin; to be sure. Everything shall be as he had it. There'll be no changes, only the one change of himself being gone."

"Thank you, Michael dear, your honour," said the old herd. "Ah, but it will be a change, and that ye may say so. Ah, dear, there's always been a gentleman at Tallat; and now, Master Michael, ye must do all your endeavours to come up to your dada. He was always a straight well-made man, dear, and ye must get a hoult upon your head and shoulders like, and endeavour to speak knowledgeably. Ye've got the blood in ye, Michael, (askin' yer pardon, sir,) and it ought to be easier for ye to be imitatin' the ways of the gentry, for all ye've no edjication, poor lamb. And," he went on, hanging on Michael's arm to prevent an escape, "look here, dear: don't you be goin' out in them ould trousers to be bringin' the honour of the family into contempt. Go into the house, darlin', to Gunyon, and get a better breeches on ye and a coat of your poor dada's, and them things'll come in very handy for Johnny the yard-boy."

"Well, well, well, I'll do all ye say, Spollin," said Michael. "But let me out now, and for this morning I'll go as I'm used to. It would ill become me to be triumphing in my father's coat this first morning of his death."

"God bless you, then, and it's you that's in the right," said Spollin, heartily. "Vainglory makes a bad master, and I'm thinkin' you'll do very well, Master Michael."

In the distance Michael discerned two stablemen watching behind a bush, and a group of women servants appearing and disappearing at the garden door; so, turning sharply round to the right, he sprang over the meadow and down towards the winding river-bed.

CHAPTER XVII

A TOKEN

WOULD Sheila be down at the river so early? that was the thought that filled Michael's mind as he reached the rough banks.

He must go up the river's course a mile and more before he came to the spot where she haunted.

As he went along, leaping and climbing, and often crossing the water on the stones, the sun came up and turned the early morning chill to gaiety.

He stopped at a wide pool, stripped and bathed, and then, refreshed, went on again.

The voice of the river soothed him as he went: sometimes, leaping over a stone, it sang like any singing-bird, in two or three gushing notes always repeated; sometimes it whispered and sometimes called aloud. The voice of the river had as many tones as a woman's voice, and the fancy took him that so would Sheila talk to her lover in the night.

As he thought it he reached the spot where he had first met her fishing.

But the place was empty of her. No voice sang with the river; the sunlight seemed cold and pale, for it lit on no silken head; the robins, celebrating their own cheer, troubled him with their unmeaning music.

After doubtfully searching with his eyes, he turned about and began quickly to climb the hill. In his haste to carry his sorrow to Sheila, he was like a child that runs with some small hurt creature in his hand, to ask for sympathy for it.

The slopes were long and steep, but Michael went up them much quicker that Sheila could, and soon he was in sight of the cottage.

The door was open, and something was out in the front: then Sheila was within and readying out the place, most likely. He listened for the bark of her dog, but the air carried him no sound.

He went up cautiously, and then all at once his heart failed him. The door was indeed open, but it hung in splinters and shivers from one hinge. In haste Michael came up the remainder of the way. Two broken chairs lay out in front. He stepped within: all was ruin. The bed in the inner room had been dragged out on the floor, the window-pane was broken, and all the tidy cottage in violent disarray.

A sense of illimitable misfortune took possession of Michael. He did not think, he only felt a dreadful woe. The place looked like a ruined nest, and the tender bird was gone.

Suddenly his eye lit on a pale object lying on the

floor of the inner room. He picked it up: it was the broken bowl of a meerschaum pipe.

Michael's passion began to swell and heave within him. He knew now who had done this monstrous deed. His memory flew back to the past, leaping like an electric spark and knitting up the fiery chain of passion. For a moment it chanced on that first evening, when he sat and resolved upon evil; then he felt again the sense of Hawk's bearded jaw under the smack of his hand, and his clenched fists craved for his enemy's throat. From past passion to passion his memory ran, and last night's bitter insults repeated themselves in his ears. He saw his father's look again, as he faced his sniggering enemies like an old lion tormented in his den. Every vein in Michael's body swelled, every muscle strained and trembled; his face grew black as he stood there, overmastered by the force of his rage.

Then at no great distance he heard a yelping and barking of a young dog. With a sudden revulsion of feeling that sent his breath from him in sobs, he stepped out into the air. There on the path along the side of the hill Sheila and her dog were running together.

The sun was upon her, lighting up her beautiful agile motions and the golden coat of her dog. They were quite near, and Sheila was calling aloud.

Michael went swiftly down the path. Almost as soon as she saw him, he was there before her. He

had no power to speak, but took her by the two shoulders and looked down into her face.

It was as unspoilt as a new-blown flower. The wide-open misty eyes were full of amazement, and there was a coming flush on the delicate cheek.

"Sheila," he said, "where did you sleep all last night?"

"With old Theresa. Michael, what is the matter at all?"

"God be thanked!" said Michael, and, loosing her, he threw himself down among the wet ferns and covered his face.

Mind and body were alike exhausted, and for a time he could think no more. Sheila's dog whined and, creeping over to him, lay down by his side, looking up in Sheila's face from time to time.

CHAPTER XVIII

BEFORE THE DOOR

As Sheila stood there, troubled and perplexed, gazing now at Michael, and now questioningly around her, her eye was caught by the splinters of her own half-open door.

With a sharp exclamation she ran up to the path to the cabin. Dismayed, she looked about, and then slipped into the house. The ruin there told its own tale to her quick intelligence: the warning in her dream had been a true one. Her next thought was grief and anger at the spoiling of her possessions. And then she thought of Michael's face. It was a strange gaze he had given her. Her face flushed as she thought of it.

She went to the door and looked out. He was up now and stooping down to play with the dog.

He came slowly towards her , still noticing Magra, and striving to conceal his face.

" This is going to be a very good dog, Sheila," he said. " He wouldn't let me alone, but was licking my cheek; now there's many dogs will run away from trouble or pay no heed. But this one has a heart like a man."

"That's the very way he is with me, Michael," answered she. "I am never sorry but he comes to me as kind as a friend."

There was a moment's constraint between them; then Michael said, "Will I help you to tidy the house, Sheila?" and he took up the two chairs, and examined them.

"Ah, why would ye be troubling yourself?" said Sheila politely, and then she went within and busied herself rearranging the inner room.

Presently she came back and stood in the door. "'Tis very ill ye look this mornin', Michael," she said. "Will I get ye something to be takin'?"

Michael put his hand to his brow.

"I thank ye, Sheila," he said. "I'm in sore trouble. My father is lying dead down there beyond. I saw sights last night, Sheila, that I shall carry with me till I die."

"Saints above!" said Sheila. "And is John Power gone? Oh, Michael, I am sorry; indeed I am. It's tired to death you look, and it's heartbroken you must be."

"I was, or very near, a moment ago, Sheila." And he took up the chairs he had temporarily mended and carried them into the house.

Sheila ran after him. "But rest yourself now, Michael. You've not been to bed this night. Go and sit on the little bench out there in the sun and I'll get you something in a half an hour. But don't go too near the skeps, for the bees do be angry at annybody but me. Do, now. Oh, Michael, wasn't

it a cruel thing to spoil the little house on me? What will I do now, Michael?" And her eyes filled with tears.

"Don't, then; don't, then," said Michael. "This night I'll make you a new door, and I can easy mend them chairs and things. But, Sheila, come here to me now till I tell you." Sheila came forward a few steps, and they stood together in the sun before the door.

Michael hesitated a moment, and Sheila looked innocently up at him. He turned away his head and said,

"Sheila, I am thinking it will be better for you to be married to me."

"Sheila was amazed: she looked down upon the ground, then quietly said,

"Indeed, Michael, and that is what I will not do."

"And why not, Sheila? It will be better for you indeed. That man will never be easy till he has you destroyed."

"I think that God Almighty would have a better care for me than that," answered Sheila.

Michael looked at her. Her face was flushed, and her bosom heaving; her eyes were misted over with tears. She stood before him in her childish gown, bare feet and slender ankles and uncovered head; but Michael saw and felt the chastity and dignity that animated the maiden, and turning away for a moment, he answered reverently, "That is the truth, Sheila, and I believe it." Then

all at once his secret love for her overflowed and, bending forward with outstretched hands, he spoke eagerly:

"Sheila, if I was to talk to you all the day and again the whole of the night, I could not tell you the half of what is in my heart for you. There is no other girl at all like you, and you are the only one that I shall love until I die. Why will you not marry me, Sheila?"

Sheila hung her head.

"I think I would be afraid, Michael," she said.

"I would be very kind to you, Sheila," he said.

"You are a good friend to me, Michael," she answered bravely, "but I am not feeling myself very old or very wise. My heart is lonesome, but I think it is my mother I am wanting." And the tears that had been standing in her eyes streamed down her cheeks.

"I am lonesome too, Sheila," said Michael sadly, watching her. "I cannot tell what in the world to do down at Tallat: the place will all run to ruin, wanting him that's gone. But I think if you would marry me, Sheila, we would be doing better together. Come," he went on, taking sudden fire and holding her by her two hands, "I am only half a man without you, Sheila. My soul is out of my body to seek you when you are not by. Lift up your head, Sheila, and say that you will marry me."

Sheila did lift up her head.

"Loose me, Michael," she said. "Loose me now this minute."

Michael slowly loosed her hands and looked questioningly into her pale face.

"Good-bye to you," said she, "and don't you dare to follow me."

She flew like a bird from him, and in a moment was far down the path, speeding on her way back to old Theresa.

CHAPTER XIX

A LATE VISITOR

On the day succeeding his father's funeral, Michael Power walked up and down the hall at Tallat till late into the evening.

The candles were lighted and the table spread, and all was fairly set in order after the waste and crowding of the day before.

The September evening had fallen with an early chill, and Father O'Brien sat by the side of the hearth, where blazed a great fire of wood and turf.

Michael paced up and down the hall, so much changed in appearance and bearing as hardly to be recognisable in the house that had bred him up. The experiences of the previous day had had a notable effect on him. His mother's people had appeared at Tallat for the first time in fourteen years and, saluting him as an equal, had bidden him to their house. Their lead had been followed by other gentlemen of the county, and Michael, in one day, from a serf had become a free man.

He wore a handsome coat of black velvet, black knee-breeches, and a ruffled shirt: a black seal-ring was on his rough labour-marked hand.

For, after some wavering and many sad laments,

Gunyon had transferred his allegiance to his master's son. The whole household had gone over with the old butler. Master Michael became the object of their idolatry: he was dressed and watched and respectfully bullied, and the house was determined to make a gentleman of him.

The commanding height and the rude natural simplicity of bearing that had made him conspicuous in his rustic clothes had a new effect in his new circumstances. The men and women servants who stood at the swing-door to see him pass down to dinner congratulated themselves on their new master.

When Gunyon came into the room to mend the fire, his old face, though paler and more sunken, was lit by an affectionate solicitude. He hovered about Michael and could only with difficulty keep his hands off his person. There was something of a maternal fondness in his expression as he regarded the sit of Michael's coat behind.

"Will your honour please to ring if you want anything?"

"Father O'Brien and I will sit up a bit longer, Gunyon," said Michael. "We shall want you no more to-night."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Gunyon, "but Mick-a-Dandy is there now in the kitchen. He's havin' a bit of supper, the creature, and he asks, as a favour, to see your honour presently."

"To be sure," answered Michael. "Bring him in when he's done with his supper."

The door closed on Gunyon, and the two young men were left alone together. The priest changed his position and turned towards Michael, who still continued his walk.

The two faces were in strange contrast: the one filled out by the lines of youth and bronzed by an out-of-door life; the other paled and thinned into hollows like that of a man who has suffered under stress of mind. But over its surface there played a kind of beam, a lightness of the eye and smile, like the movement that passes over the surface of deep waters in the afternoon.

"Well, Mr. Power," he said, "help you I will, and welcome; but may I ask how it comes that, with all this good appetite, you never yet found time for learning?"

Michael half smiled.

"Indeed, to tell you the truth," he said, "my poor father, God rest him, burned every book ever I got hold of. I've known him ride a couple of miles to a harvest-field to hunt me out, after he got the news that I'd been seen there under a tree taking a lesson of a hedge-schoolmaster."

"Still," said the priest, "I think you might have found some way out of it. I'd have got my learning whether or no."

"You never rightly knew my father, sir," said Michael. "See here," and as he passed up the hall he turned a tumbler over a wasp that had flown in through the open window and was crawling on the table. The wasp rose and buzzed in the glass.

"See here," said he, "that was my fate. He had no mercy on me; and yet, 'pon my honour, I'm weeping after him in my heart twenty times a day."

Father O'Brien nodded.

"Well, but why," said he, "did you always show yourself so surly to me when I would have helped you?"

Michael stood and half laughed.

"That I can't tell you," he said. "I was always shy at taking anything from pity. And then maybe I feared you would want me to swallow religion before I got knowledge."

"It would have been better for you, Michael Power," said the priest, shaking his head. "Far better indeed; for then the chastened heart you might have gained from your affliction would have had mercy on your years of heat and pride. You will have work enough now before you if you want to escape the damnation that overtakes every other gentleman of this country."

"Sharp words, father," said Michael, taking up his walk again. "Not much heat and pride have I known. It was a slave's life that I led in all ways, barring that I had no fellows."

"And look at you now," said the priest, turning in his chair, with a humourous smile, "with a velvet coat on your back, and your chin in the air, and the red on your cheek, heading straight for the devil, if I'm to believe all the talk I hear, which, thank God, I don't."

Michael turned in astonishment, but, before he

could speak, the door was flung open and Gunyon appeared, beckoning and calling over his shoulder into the passage, as a lady might to her pet dog.

"Come on, Mick-a-Dandy; come on, me poor fellow. His honour will excuse you, Mick-a-Dandy. Make your bow to his honour, me poor fellow."

Mick-a-Dandy came in, bowing and scraping.

"A fine night, your honours," he said, "the Lord be praised." Then, gazing more particularly at Michael, he fell into a kind of ecstasy. "Ah, then, sir," he said with uplifted hands, "and is it yourself? And a coat on your back like a king's, and a light in your eye, and a frown on your face, for all the world like your poor dada that's gone. Ah, musha, there now! There's a better look for poor Mick-a-Dandy that always loved ye and would travel from here to Cork on the bare soles of his feet in your service. Ah, God keep your honour," he went on, going down on his knees and kissing Michael's hand "God keep yer honour, and may ye be always a friend to the poor man and bring down a blessing on the country. Could I have a word alone with your honour?" he said, getting up and speaking in a loud whisper.

Michael hesitated. Father O'Brien must have heard some story of him and Sheila, he thought, put about the country by Hawks.

"You can say whatever you have to say before Father O'Brien," he said at last.

"Sure, it's only I've been at the fair," said Mick-

a-Dandy in innocent surprise, "and I didn't want to be troubling his reverence's ares with common talk."

"Come, now, Mick-a-Dandy," said Father O'Brien, "his reverence's ears are none so high and mighty, as you know very well. How's your head since I saw you?"

"Clear as a lark's, your reverence," he answered, "thanking you kindly. It's ready to praise God I am on the road, every minute of the day, this beautiful weather. Ah, look at that, now," he said, going over to the table. "There's one of them little felles in a glass house, and lookin' very bad off. Ye never saw annything to equal them in the fair to-day. By the four roads they came from the four quarters of heaven. It was like as if they'd got the word the honey was comin' down from the mountains, for there they were all to meet it, and triumph over the bees like. There was a little girl there that lives up on the hill beyant, Sheila McBride by name, and she came very bad out of it; and troth I'm thinkin' there was more in it than the wasps, too. There's a mighty fine waggin' of tongues in Gurt this day. Annyway there was the poor little girl leggin' it over the mountains by herself, and breakin' her heart over some foolishness. Yer honour's not contintted with me talkin'?" he said innocently, as Michael made a sudden movement. "And indeed it's meself doesn't know what I'm talkin' about half the time. Anyway, it was a grand

fair, and they're talkin' that Mr. Peter Mylotte, him they're namin' the Copperhead, is called in church by rason he's about to demane himself upon Nora O'Hea, the creature, God send her as much sense as she has money. And the lawyer, crooked Sam Muldoon, is goin' to put the bailiffs in at Killaraa. Faith, I couldn't tell ye the half of what all they're tellin'. And will yer honour be so kind as for to allowance me to sleep on the warm side of the new hayrick down in the haggart? Thank yer honour, thank yer honour, and that ye may rest easy yerself. I came over the mountain back from the fair, sir, and I rested meself in ould Theresa's house. Good night, yer reverence. There's no harm in me at all, yer reverence; not a haporth. Good night, yer honour," he said, bowing himself backwards out of the door; then opening it again just enough to let pass his red head, and looking anxiously at Michael's troubled face,

"Will I give yer honour a crow before I go?" he said.

"Not now, Mick-a-Dandy, my good boy," said Michael. "Take yourself away now and good night to you. I'll see you in the morning early."

Mick-a-Dandy's head was slowly withdrawn; but it was late and very late before the priest went home.

CHAPTER XX

THE HONEY FAIR

THAT same morning old Theresa and Sheila had been up with the dawn. They had borrowed a small grey ass and creels to take their honey to the autumn fair of Gurt.

He was an old ass and very cunning, said his owner, and was in the habit of playing on every woman he had to do with. So they must rise early and put a nail in the end of a stick if they wanted to be in time for the fair.

The honey was in two great earthen pots, and they lifted Theresa's into one creel and Sheila's into another, and covered each with a fair white cloth.

As they were going to the town, Sheila must wear her long black dress, and her boots too; but as she had the ass to drive, she could not take the wide black shawl; so she loosely tied on a little drab-coloured head-shawl and let it fall back on her shoulders.

It was a very cheerful young face that looked up to the sky to discover the promise of the day. Old Theresa, too, was in fine spirits; it was a good

honey year, none better. She trundled along behind Sheila and the ass in her handsome red cloak, the frilled cap under her little round hat of black straw shining as white as snow.

They got down the hill path and out along the road before the sun fairly rose; the air was fresh with an autumnal chill, and from twig to twig in the hedges hung a tapestry of spiders' webs wonderfully beaded with dew.

Theresa had armed herself with a holly branch; then when the old grey ass desired to go home to his owner and went sideways across the road, looking at Sheila with a cautious eye, Theresa would correct him with a loud screetch and a blow from the holly branch.

In this way they got on very comfortably together a good piece of the road. Then the warm sun came up and, flashing through the hedges, turned the grey dew-drops to many-coloured flaming jewels. Soon it woke up flies or wasps from their sleep, and, smelling the sweet heather honey as it passed, they followed after Sheila in an increasing swarm.

Carts and donkeys laden with honey and butter and eggs began to overtake them, and Sheila and Theresa received many greetings and kind words, for in their slow travelling all the fair that took that way must pass them.

As they drew on to the town, the air was alive with the noise of men's voices shouting, of the screaming of poultry and the squealing of pigs. They

could hardly find a way to guide their ass and precious creels through the people to the great wall of the convent garden beneath which always sat the women with their eggs and butter and the honey of the autumn fair.

Theresa had secured a board and trestles, and they set out their two pots side by side and tethered the ass near by. So much business done, Theresa fell to talking at a great rate with the women right and left of her. Sheila found a block of wood for a seat and leaned back against the wall, excited and bewildered.

This was the first time she had been at a fair; her mother, come of a strict and respectable family herself, had never allowed her daughter even to the market; so that this was only the second time she had been to Gurt.

From her seat she looked across the wide sunny market-place, feeling somewhat forlorn, for Theresa was not of her blood; and then her talk was that of an old woman, and Sheila had the thoughts of a young girl who still fears the mysteries of life.

The market-place was fast filling, and her ears were almost deafened by the noise that rose up from the crowd. To her right, across the slated roofs of the better-class houses, she could see the Chapel Tower, in the shadow of which her parents were resting. Right across the market-place was the ancient Abbey of Gurt, showing now only a ruined arch or two shadowed in tree-tops that ap-

peared above the edge of the hollow in which it had hidden secure during hundreds of years.

On the left hand, whitewashed cottages, their roofs of every shade from dun to gold, climbed up the slope.

On the far side of the market-place a man was putting his head out of a barrel and inviting the young men to take shots at it. In front of Sheila and a little distance off, a cheap Jack had pulled up his cart. He had raised a white canvas awning over it, and now he was shouting and dancing upon it in the middle of his wares.

The crowd grew thicker and the noise greater every moment; it seemed a good-humoured crowd and well clothed, the men in their grey-blue frieze, the women in their scarlet cloaks or petticoats, greeting, talking, and bargaining together.

Sheila had lived so lonely upon her hill that she knew little or nothing of what was in the public mind of the people. She had heard now and then a talk of the Protestant tithes; Theresa had told her a tale of how soldiers, horse and foot, had been sent into the next county to take a Catholic widow's cow. But Sheila had lived too remote, and the signs of a secret discontent, shared here and there among little dark-faced groups, passed unnoticed by her.

As she gazed about her, the travelling merchant, having assembled a fine company about his cart by his antics, commenced business by dangling an article of clothing before their eyes.

"Look at this, now," he shouted in a powerful roar, now using English, now Irish. "What do ye call this? I won't make so bold as to name it, but I'll just ask ye to look at the beauty of it. There's cut for ye and patthern. Sure the red soldiers themselves don't have a better shape to them than this, and no offence. How much? Six shillin's? Ah, take shame to yourself. Will six shillin's pay the sheep that carried it, and the man that wove it, and the ship that took it over the say, and me for the trouble I'm at to improve yer appearance? Sure this is rale English. Eight shillin's? Eight dhivils! Aren't I after telling ye it's rale English? None of your dirty Irish factory stuff, as thick as a board, that the girls is tired of beholdin'. Eight and six, nine shillin's. Look at the check on it. Ten and six. Here ye are, me boy, and that ye may never repint it!"

And rolling up the article, in a moment he had sent the little bundle flying over the heads of the people in the direction of a bashful young peasant in the background.

Sheila was still smiling at the antics of the little black-browed man, when a sudden strange misgiving came upon her. It was like the rising of a cloud that darkens a sunny day. She felt as though some ill-wishing person were near, or as though she were somewhere evilly spoken of.

At the same moment she saw people's heads all turning in one direction; some were laughing and others gaping. Sheila looked, and in the distance

across the market-place she saw moving a strange purple-coloured dress. The people between hindered her view of the woman that wore it, and she had just stood up to look, when Theresa spoke in her ear.

"Sheila," she said in a hurry, "I'm just goin' round the fair, and it'll not be wan minute before I'm back. I've sold me honey, pot and all, to Mrs. Muldoon, and I'd advise you to be lookin' after your own in place of gapin' about ye."

There was a tone of sharp familiarity in Theresa's voice, yet Sheila in her new unrealised anxiety took her by the sleeve, saying,

"Oh, Theresa, why would ye leave me? See, now, I don't know the place nor the people, nor yet how to sell the honey."

Theresa looked cross.

"Don't I tell ye I'll be back in a minute?" said she. "To hear ye talk, annybody would think ye were a baby, and you nigh eighteen years old."

Sheila took away her hand and drew up her head. "And look at here, now," went on Theresa more kindly, "the wasps is something to frighten you. I never seen the like of them. They're into the honey in spite of ye. Here's for ye, now, and Mrs. Mulcahy'll mind ye while I'm gone." Thrusting a stick with a piece of leather on the end of it into Sheila's hand, she went off hastily to join two other women, and Sheila was left alone.

With a beating heart she stood up by her big honey-pot, noticing for the first time the number

of wasps that crawled upon the board and flew round about it, making a sharp hum that could be heard through the shouting of the fair.

Sheila looked down and up the row of honey-sellers, and there were all the women guarding their faces, while with coloured handkerchiefs and sticks like Sheila's they struck away the swarm.

Sheila turned about to look for the Mrs. Mulcahy that Theresa had said was to mind her. She saw a little old woman with a witch-like look, untidy grey hair, and a long sharp nose. She was talking confidentially to a middle-aged farmer, while with a wry smile she laid out in patterns on her board the dead bodies of the wasps she had killed.

Sheila thought they seemed to be glancing at her as they talked, and felt still more uneasy. But that moment she caught sight again of the purple-clad figure moving through the fair, looking, so Sheila thought, like a princess out of a book.

She forgot her shyness and ran across to her neighbour.

"Oh, Mrs. Mulcahy!" she said, "look at the wonderful lady! Did you ever see the like of her before?"

Mrs. Mulcahy looked up sharply into Sheila's innocent face without speaking. But the sharpness soon melted out under the glance of Sheila's shining eyes.

"Lady?" she said, "and on foot in the fair in that dress? That's no lady. Sure I lived ten years

up at the Castle, and I can tell a lady be the kick of her skirt."

Sheila stood still by Mrs. Mulcahy's board and looked across at the purple-clad woman, whom she could see more plainly now. She was both stout and tall, and her dress of flowered puce muslin was covered with many strange frills; her tiny hat rode upon a mass of bright-coloured hair, and as she swam along she rolled her shoulders and laughed.

There were two gentlemen by her side, one a young officer in undress uniform, the other Sheila looked at with some anxiety; in a moment he turned and she saw it was Hawks. At the same moment he caught sight of her and, smiling widely, kissed his hand to her across the space between. Sheila turned pale. Mrs. Mulcahy and the farmer had both seen it, and it seemed to her they looked at her suspiciously. She was just going to beg Mrs. Mulcahy to take care of her honey and let her go away home by herself, when she felt a tap on her shoulder.

A stout motherly-looking country body had come up and wanted to taste Sheila's honey, so she had to go and attend upon her and talk and offer her a piece of the comb, knocking away the wasps that swarmed about it; but all the time her heart within her was fluttering with anxiety lest Hawks should make his way in her direction.

"Beautiful honey, my dear," said the country-woman, "as sweet as the flowers; but fourpence a pound! Everything is as dear to-day as if it was

set out for a nation of princes to be buyin'. But, holy Virgin, who at all is this?"

Sheila dared not raise her eyes; she held by the board with both hands and felt rather than saw that the purple-clad lady and her companions were descending upon her.

She heard a harsh laugh and saw the country-woman backing away, and looked up at last to see herself surrounded.

Right in front of her stared and laughed the face of the woman; it was of a strange whitish colour, with a wide smile—such a face as Sheila had never imagined, even in dreams. Instinctively she made the sign of the cross on her bosom, and "Christ be between us and harm!" she murmured to herself.

"This is the young woman I told you about," Hawks was saying loudly. "'Pon me word, for as simple as she looks, it would be a good job if she was put out of the fair!"

Sheila looked up in horror. A crowd had gathered behind Hawks and round about her table; some of the young people were laughing and staring at the strange woman, but the older faces behind were serious enough.

"Ow, Mr. Hawks!" laughed the strange woman, "don't ask me to believe in a face! The greatest little wretches ever I seen had the sweetest looks in the world. Lard, wat a parcel of wasps! They're after the honey. I declare I dote upon honey meself."

"Have some now," said the lively officer.

"Give the good lady some honey, my dear," said Hawks, smiling.

Sheila's anger began to rise, and with it her courage; she looked straight into her enemy's face, and said quietly:

"I could not give you any honey, even if you had manners in the asking. If I break the comb, I cannot sell it after."

With a loud laugh the young officer snatched up a long-handled spoon and drove it into Sheila's honey, breaking the comb and spoiling more than he took, while Hawks began working his way round to Sheila. "I'll sell the honey for you fast enough," he said. Sheila did not see that Mrs. Mulcahy and the farmer were making their way over to her, nor did she notice that many people in the crowd were scowling angrily at Hawks; she only saw the many eyes that looked and looked. She glanced despairingly round, and catching sight at the same moment of a familiar face, she ran from her place and pressed forward, calling, "Oh, Nora, Nora, let me go with you! Theresa has left me, and I'm all alone!" Her face was white and she was greatly affrighted.

But in place of the friendly welcome she had always had from Nora, she was treated to a new manner, a high and mighty stare.

"Well, and hasn't she the face!" said Mrs. O'Hea, her round red countenance growing redder, and her voice audible to all around. "Nice tales they're telling about you, young woman, and

from all I see I think them true. Come along, Nora; what would Mylotte say?"

"Shame on ye, woman," said a voice Sheila did not know, and a tall strapping woman put her arm about her and threw the corner of a wide shawl round her. "Come with me, my dear; I knew your mother well; it's a shame for you to be left like this to run like a rabbit through the fair. Never take on, agra," she said as Sheila turned and wept under the friendly shawl. "What's this now? Saints alive! there's Mick-a-Dandy. He's goin' to sell the honey for ye and, troth, he's more than a match for them Hawkses. Husht now, and listen."

Sheila looked out from her shelter, and there was Mick-a-Dandy standing on a tub behind her board, with his hands raised to heaven, and his face beaming with delight, as he confronted her enemies, who seemed to be trying to escape but could not for the crowd behind.

"Ah, then!" Mick-a-Dandy was saying, "who'd have thought it? The Lord be praised! If it isn't Bould Bridget, the publican's daughter out of Bawnboy that ran off with the tide-waiter! Ah, but you're lookin' grand! Ah, yerra, where at all did ye get the dhress, woman dear, and the little hat? Ah, Bridget darlin', many's the day I seen your mother, decent woman, waitin' for ye in the back yard with her ould besom; for, says she, the bould strap'll be afeared to come in the front way because of her dada, but she'll think to play on her mammie, and little she knows

the sort of sweepin' I have ready for her. Arrah, Captain, your honour, what at all are ye goin' on that way for? Sure, why wouldn't I be glad to see Bridget Flannery? Haven't I known her since the days she was runnin' the linth of the gutter in Bawnboy, before your honour's father so much as had the news of ye for good or evil? More betoken, yer honour had better be goin' home: sign is on it, I met your honour's father out raisin' the country after ye, and a blackthorn stick in the trap behind him." The crowd roared with laughter, and Mick-a-Dandy stood for a minute enjoying himself; he dipped his finger in the spilt honey and waved it in the air while three or four wasps flew and tried to settle upon it. Then he turned and shouted after Hawks, who was making his way through the crowd:

"Ah, your worship, glad and thankful I am to see ye laughin' and jokin' this mornin', and the bailiffs gone out to Killaraa. 'Deed the whole country's sorry for yer honour, to think the noble house of Killaraa should come to disgrace for half a hundred dirty debts to poor tradespeople and farmers like. Troth and I think," he went on, raising his voice higher and higher as his victims escaped, "yer honours might find a better mornin's work to do than stravagin' the country with Bridget Flannery.—Ah sure, they're gone," he said, looking about him with a smile, "and I might as well quit."

The crowd laughed and cheered him. "Now,"

said he, "who'll buy the orphan's honey? Mountain honey from Swanlabar: look at all them wasps come after it. Troth, and there's been another kind of wasps about in the fair this mornin', and it's after something else than the honey they were. Let them that has a feelin' heart buy the orphan's honey, fourpence a pound!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE PROMISE

SHEILA sat weeping down by the river. Too weary for sleep, she had lain the live-long night awake in Theresa's cottage, her proud heart in torment. The night through she had not moved; her hands were clasped together; not a sigh came from her lips. By turns her spirit fell in the dust, downcast and cold, covered in shame; and then again, rising in anger and rebellion, it shook her whole body with passion. She had learned how the world can buffet those that have no helper, and the learning of it was very bitter to her.

But with the coming of the beautiful daylight her passion died away. She rose with the dawn and stole out on the cold hillside. There she knelt on a bare stone, and prayed long by herself.

She prayed for a pure heart, a clean life, and clean hands. She had seen evil faces and evil doings, and she would have no part or lot in them. As she prayed she felt a strong belief within her that it mattered nothing what men, ay, or women, could do or say so long as she could kneel out on the mountainside, with no cloud between her and heaven.

In that temper she rose up and went away to her own little house, smiling with pleasure as she saw the new green door, with its three strong bolts on the inside, that Michael or one of his men had put up the night before.

But the morning was very long. She lit her fire and played with her dog, milked her white goat and baked a cake of bread. When she had had her breakfast, she felt sadly weary and discouraged, and she longed in her heart for her friend.

Hardly confessing to herself why she did so, she began to descend the hillside, pausing and stopping every now and then to caress Magra and admire his beauty, which increased with every day.

When she got down as far as the river, there was no friend there for her: she went to look at the hole where Michael had been putting plums and apples, but there was nothing in it but an earwig.

Her heart fell; she went and sat on a stone by the water's edge and began to cry, as she read over a letter she held in her hand.

Then suddenly she heard a crackling of bushes a long way off. From the way the dog darted off without a sound, Sheila knew it was Michael.

She heard him whistle, and then saw him come breaking through the bushes. Sheila started forward, then hung back; for the lonely child in her would have run to meet him, but the maiden in her timidly stayed.

He was looking just the same as ever, dressed in his working clothes, and gazing towards her with

an eager countenance. In his hand he carried a rough basket full of apples and yellow and purple plums.

Sheila's heart gave a throb of delight and pride; it was a sweet face she raised to his—pale with weariness, wet with tears, but shining with a beautiful smile.

"Sheila, my darling!" cried Michael, and setting down the basket at her feet, he drew her over to him and then with his hand gently raised her face. She looked straight up to him. "Oh, Michael," she said, "I missed you yesterday." Then, putting his arm timidly away, she stooped for the basket, and turned over the fruit, while Michael stood and watched her.

"You are very kind to me," she said at last.

"It is not kindness, Sheila," he answered. "I cannot help it. Whether I will or not, I must think of you all day and all night. I never can see a green bush but I think how handsome it would be to see you come walking out from behind it. And when I do see you coming at last, it is like the breaking of the dawn. Now listen to me, Sheila," he said, his voice growing more passionate while his hand hovered about her curls. "Listen to me. What I have suffered this night hearing all that happened in the fair yesterday cannot be told. I will not have you destroyed, Sheila: that man is telling every bad story of you and of me through the country. I have spoken to Father O'Brien, Sheila, and he will marry us in the church

in three weeks' time. There is no other way for your safety. Did you ever hear of young Eliza Foley? You never did? Well, she drowned herself in a bog-hole, and I go in fear of what may happen to you, Sheila."

"Come here, now, and sit on this stone, till I show you something," said Sheila gravely. Michael followed her, and they sat down on two stones, and Sheila gave Michael the letter she held in her hand. "My father's brother is the parish priest in Kilgobnet," she said. "I have had it these three days: now read you what he says."

Michael read the letter and then looked at her, his face grown suddenly pale.

"You would never do that, Sheila?" he said. "Leave the country and go to live fifty miles off?"

"That is what I made my mind to do this morning, Michael. You see what he says: he will give me a good home, and the nuns of the convent will give me an education."

Michael stood up in his place and walked to and fro, his head sunk upon his breast. Then he took something from his pocket and came and sat near her again.

"See here, Sheila," he said, opening a worn leather case. "This is what I can give you." Within the case lay an ancient necklet of silver set with large diamonds that sent out many-coloured rays into the sunlight.

Sheila caught up the jewel with a cry of delight.

"Oh, Michael! Where in the world did you get such a beautiful thing?"

"It has always been there at Tallat," he said. "And now I will give it to you, Sheila. My mother wore it now and then."

"And is it worth anything, Michael?"

"Hundreds of pounds, Sheila."

Sheila paused a moment; then a deep flush came into her face. Free and proud and mountain-bred, she felt a stealing sense of shame that Michael should try to buy her as a wife with money's worth.

"I thank you, Michael," she said coldly. "The like of that would ill become me. Take it back again to Tallat with you."

Michael was bitterly hurt. Without a word he shut up the beautiful ornament and, putting it in his pocket, commenced pacing up and down.

Sheila's mood changed in a minute when she saw his face grow dark: she got up with a naughty smile, and dropped him a curtsey.

"Good morning to you," she said. "I must be going back to the house, to write the letter to my uncle. But I will take the good plums for my dinner, thanking you kindly." And away she went.

Michael was angry. He felt himself mocked. He would not look at her, but turned away, a dark look on his face.

Moodily he stood kicking stones into the water, when suddenly there was a rush of soft feet, and there was Sheila clinging to his arm, her eyes full of tears.

"Ah, wisha, wisha!" she said. "Don't be cross with me, Michael. What will I do at all? My heart will break to go away among strangers. Sure, I love every blade of grass on the hill, and every stone by the water. I am a very lonely girl since the black day my mother died."

Michael took her kindly in his arms, and with his large hand brushed away the tear from her cheek. Sheila trembled slightly, but she did not move.

"Then you will marry me, Sheila?"

She breathed quickly and tried to free herself. But, as she could not bring that about, she smiled up at him and said, "Where in the world did you get the tie, Michael? I have never seen one like it at all."

"Now, Sheila," said Michael gravely, "it is no good for you to play. Let me tell you this, now: if you go away to Kilgobnet, I will give up Tallat and all I had hoped to do in it and follow after you. I will take the place of a day-labourer to be near you. I cannot live without you, Sheila. You must marry me: there is no other way for us both."

Sheila burst out sobbing, and hid her face in his rough working coat.

"If you will be cross, I will do nothing at all," she said.

"I will be kind to you all your life, Sheila. Promise, now."

"Very well, then, I will," she said with a fresh burst of sobs. "Only I am not happy at all."

She fluttered within his arms like a frightened bird, and Michael comforted her as well as he could, smoothing her soft curls and speaking tender words.

"Thank you kindly, Michael," she said at last. "And would you please to let me out now?"

Michael loosed her, and she went away from him to the water's edge, and sat down leaning against a tree, her face hidden in her hand and a great longing in her heart for her mother.

Michael felt pity for her; he looked about him, and his eye lit on the plums.

"Sheila," he said, "I will make your dinner for you. There is plenty of fish in the river, and here is garden fruit; and I know where I can get a few potatoes, Sheila, if you will wait for me ten minutes here."

The rest of the morning and the afternoon went by in great happiness for them both. The fish gave them sport in the catching and the roasting, while the potatoes baked in the ashes below. They were like boy and girl together, for the youth and gaiety which had been so long cramped about Michael's heart overflowed, and made the day one delightful game.

Later, as they sat together on a bank, Sheila suddenly leaned on her elbow and her face grew pale.

"Oh, Michael," she said, "you could never believe how tired I am. Not one wink of sleep did I get last night. I was angered, and my heart so

sore. And oh, Michael, I do not like to live with Theresa. It was so late when she came back from the fair, and then she was so—stupid, Michael. And she was not kind at the fair to me."

"The old witch!" said Michael. "I'll make her sorry for that. Sleep in your own house, Sheila, for to-night."

"It's too much afraid I am," said Sheila, shaking her head. "If you had seen the wicked look Mr. Hawks gave me yesterday, and the rude way he had with him. Oh. I'm feared of him to the bottom of my heart, since ever I saw the broken door."

Sheila did not look up; but if she had, she would have seen Michael throw back his head and clench his teeth, while his chest was heaved up and his breath held back by the sudden wrath that overtook him: it turned him dizzy, so that the trees and bushes danced before his eyes.

When Sheila had finished her plum she looked up, and then Michael answered her naturally.

"Sleep in your own house, Sheila dear, for to-night, and Mick-a-Dandy and I will watch, turn and turn, upon the hill. No harm will come to you; and the morrow's morn, please God, I'll rattle old Theresa."

"Oh, then, and will you watch the house for me?" said Sheila, like a delighted child. "But, Michael dear, leave old Theresa alone. You would only make her angry and not any different at all. Old people are very stiff. And she cannot help the

way she is made. But I am afraid you will be tired, Michael, sitting out on the hill."

"No," said Michael. "This is the grandest day of my life, and I will walk on the top of the hill thanking God for his gift to me. Oh! Sheila, three weeks from this day, I will get you a grand gown from Dublin, and you will look like a queen."

"I will have no grand dress," said Sheila. "Do you think I will be like Nora O'Hea, and go dressed in scarlet with pearls around my neck? No, indeed, the whole country would be laughing at me. I will have a plain dress, Michael, and not pretend to be any but what I am."

For a long time they sat and talked together, for they had much to say. They spoke of Nora's strange behaviour, and of the old house where Mr. Mylotte lived, and how he only kept a tottering old man and woman as servants in the house. They talked of John Power, and of Sheila's parents, and of the far-off home where Sheila had been born; of the two Hawkses, and the ruin that was coming on Killaraa; of the people, and how angry they would be all in a minute over the tithes; and of Michael's plans for the future, and of how he desired to get knowledge and do his best for his people and the houses and the land.

Many times Sheila said she must be going, but Michael still kept her. At last Sheila looked up, and there were the long horns and the white face of her goat, looking patiently at her from behind a bush.

"She is tired of waiting, and she is come to look for you, Sheila," said Michael.

Sheila laughed, and with a light "Good-bye to you, Michael, and good night," she was slipping off through the trees.

But Michael came after, and took and kissed her and said "God bless you," many times. Sheila went softly up the hill, with her dog and her goat travelling beside her, and she was glad in her heart that she had found her friend.

With that thought she bolted her door and went to her own bed, and slept the hours through in an enchanted rest.

Once from outside the sound of Mick-a-Dandy's loud crow upon the hill came to her sleeping ear, and she smiled as she lay in her dreams.

CHAPTER XXII

THE STRANGER

THE next day Sheila was sitting on the hillside knitting a stocking, with Magra beside her. She was looking down on the trees of Tallat below. They were turning all colours in the fresh autumn air; soon they would fall and the roofs of Tallat would be seen again : but then she would be down below instead of up on the mountain. It seemed like an empty tale to her; try as she might, she could not imagine what the different rooms would be like under those roofs of slate, or how she would feel as she walked about down there.

As she sat half hidden between a heather bush and a big stone, she suddenly saw a stranger coming up the hill path. It was a gentleman dressed in dark-coloured clothes, carrying an oddly-shaped box or case. He was tall, and his head was bent down as he came very slowly up.

Sheila's heart beat with excitement: it was not once in five years that a stranger came up that path. She did not stir from her hiding-place; rather, she made herself smaller and laid her hand on Magra's neck, who looked up at her intelligently, wagging

his tail. Could it be her uncle the priest? she thought. Then she would not go away with him, not one step. But no: that was no priest's coat.

As she craned her neck over to watch the stranger on the winding path, Magra tried to dart from under her hand, but she held him firmly.

The well was just below her, and there the stranger stopped and, removing his hat, knelt by the water and drank from the cup of his hand.

Then he rose up and looked away down the valley, and then Sheila heard a heavy sigh that was like a groan. Magra began to struggle and whimper, and the stranger turned hastily and looked up the hill.

His eyes met Sheila's, and she stood up pale and trembling. It was Michael, but not the Michael who had said "God bless you" yesterday.

Her dog rushed forward and threw himself upon Michael's knees, but Sheila hung back aghast. The shining autumn day was suddenly darkened to her and she was full of fear.

"Good day, Sheila," said Michael. "Come down here to me. I have something for you."

Even the voice sounded different to her ears: it was like the voice of a sick man. But she came slowly down nevertheless, and stood by the well.

"What is the matter, Sheila?" said Michael impatiently. "Are you so foolish as to be afraid of a suit of clothes?"

Sheila proudly reared up her neck and looked at

Michael with her clear eyes. He flushed and turned away.

"I am not well at all to-day, Sheila," he said, taking his hand to his brow. "My head is very sore. I do not know what is the matter with me at all."

Sheila was full of concern in a moment. She put her hand on his arm.

"Ah, Michael, it is very ill you are. I could tell it in a minute by your face, and down there I heard you sighing like the winter's wind. Go home to bed, Michael dear, and send me up word how you find yourself the morrow's morn."

"Maybe I will," said he, "but sit down now and see what there is here for you. I found it upon a shelf there at Tallat." He gave her the case, and sat down by the well to watch her open it.

Sheila knelt upon the short turf, and turned the case about and about, and at last found the way to open it. Inside a fiddle lay in a dark lining. Sheila drew it out, and with an exclamation of delight she tried the strings and tightened them and drew the bow across and across them, and the fiddle gave out sweet full sounds the like of which she had never heard before.

In deep delight she turned to Michael, and met suddenly such a look coming from his eyes as pierced her like the point of a sword.

Horror and anguish, love and woe were there, and his face was changed. She threw away fiddle and bow, and ran and cast herself upon his neck.

"What is it, Michael alanna?" she cried. "What is it has broken your heart?"

Michael took her into his arms and laid his head upon her young breast, and "Oh, my lamb!" he said. "Oh, my jewel and my treasure; my dear-bought treasure! God pity us! God pity us!"

Never another word would he say, but presently went away down the path in his black clothes, with his pale face bent upon the ground.

And Sheila was left there upon the hill, heavy-hearted, her happiness of yesterday gone like the breath of a flower.

CHAPTER XXIII

THERESA'S NEWS

THE three weeks that followed went quickly by for Sheila. The hours seemed to vanish as though they were running a race backwards into the past; day hurried to meet the evening, and night hastened to the morning before it was well begun.

Every day the sun shone, piercing the early mists that veiled it again at night. Not a leaf stirred upon the trees of the valley that changed each day beneath Sheila's eyes to a greater splendour of gilded yellow and crimson red. Summer seemed still to wait about the valleys, holding her breath, as though fearing the attack of winter, yet loth to take her flight.

Day after day Michael came up the hill in his new livery of black, the dark shadow never lifted from his face. And day after day Sheila feared her fate more and more, and would have run to the ends of the earth to escape it.

Strange tales came to her of Michael; Theresa, who knew all the talk of the country, never spared to tell her.

He was running a fine rig, said Theresa one

morning, as bad as any of them. Last night he had been dining at the Blue Soldier Hotel in Gurt with them young Butlers, playing cards and losing a heap of money. And at the last his horse came home without him, and the servants of Tallat went out with lanterns and found him as drunk as a lord on the road, and carried him to his bed like a gentlemen. And, said Theresa, "sure they're all the one thing, gentle and simple; it's the quietest is the worst in the end. Rich and poor, I've seen enough come into the world and go out of it: ay, and marry and fight and get drunk; and they all do it the one way, and it's the women that pays."

Sheila turned away sick and trembling. To what fate was she going? Where was the Michael who had said "God bless you" so kindly down by the river? Theresa looked at her and laughed—an old woman's laugh, too wise by far for a young maid's ears; then she went on to tell of Killaraa, and how old Hawks had taken to his bed and the housekeeper was nursing him, and Mrs. Hawks sat all day in the front parlour drinking tea at ten shillings a pound, as happy as a queen. And how young Willie the Devil had taken himself off to be out of the trouble, no one knew where, "and that he may stay there!" said old Theresa.

And she began to laugh again as she talked of Nora O'Hea and how Mylotte had taken her home to the old house, and there never had been so much as the rub of a duster over a stick in it, and Mylotte had sent away the girl Mrs. O'Hea had put

in as servant, because she had a cast in her eye, he said; "and that was true enough, for I've seen the young woman myself," said old Theresa.

Sheila slipped away out of the cottage to be free from her talk, and taking her fiddle, went and sat on the hill, shutting her heart to Theresa's story and hoping against hope that Michael would come that day.

But he never did, for Theresa's story was only too true. And Sheila sat up on the mountainside, playing softly over the airs she knew—"The Brown Thorn," and "The Heather Hill," and "The Bright Black Rose." Sometimes she sang, too, softly to herself, till her voice fell away in tears.

The next day she was out again, looking for Michael, but instead of him came three asses up the grass road past Theresa's cottage, and every ass had on his back a box of clothes sent for Sheila from Dublin. They were set down on the floor in her cottage, and when she had paid the men she would not look at the boxes, but went out again to look for Michael.

At last she saw him coming, and set out to meet him.

He smiled on her very kindly, but his face was troubled and white.

Sheila did not want for courage. She took Michael by the hand and made him sit down in the heather away from the path.

"Michael," she said trembling, "I have a favour

to ask of you: let me go away for a year to my uncle the priest. I do not want to be married at all."

Michael looked keenly at her, and she dropped her eyes.

"Have you been listening to any stories about me?" said he.

"I have, Michael."

"And what?" said he, loud in a rage.

Sheila looked him in the face. "Why did you not come up the hill yesterday? And what is that mark on your cheek? And is it true that your people went out at night and found you upon the road?"

Michael sighed and grew more quiet.

"Indeed and it is true, if that was all," he said in a hopeless tone.

"Then, Michael, let me go," she said.

"No," he answered, looking at her sadly. "It is too late, Sheila. I cannot let you go."

"Michael," she said, in tears, "I beg and pray of you to let me go."

Michael put his arm about her and gently quieted her.

"Sheila, you would not refuse water to a dying man, or health to the sick. I am in heavy trouble, and if I cannot have you I will end my days at once. All day long my heart is wounded thinking of you, and at night I see you in every dream. Hither and thither you are going, and I put out my arms to take you, and so I wake and you are

not there. It is too powerful for me, Sheila. I must follow you wherever you go. Try now and be patient and kind to an unhappy man."

"But are you sorry, Michael, for behaving so?"

"I am sorry to grieve you, my dear. Did you get the clothes from Dublin, Sheila?"

"Yes," she said listlessly, "and thank you. And must it be Thursday, Michael?"

"Ay, Thursday!" said he, his face lighting up. "That will be the happy day!"

"And you will not tell me your trouble, Michael?"

"No, Sheila, my dear and my darling: never in this world."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WEDDING GOWN

It was the night before Sheila's wedding; she had just parted with Michael on the hill, and come into her cottage and shut the door.

Her face was deeply flushed, her bosom heaved, and she wrung her slender hands as she stood by the fire.

A broad flame leaped up, flickering; Sheila's tall shadow waved about the cottage, chased along the wall, and, when the flame sank down, seemed to disappear into the dark doorway of the inner room, a noiseless shape.

Sheila turned, holding her breath: it was as if she had seen her mother pass before her eyes. With silent step she crept across the room towards the door; then came hastily back and raked together the half-burned turves, till the fire shone again on the hearth.

She lit first one candle and then another, for she had much work to do. Then, hesitating, she passed into the inner room, where dark shadows seemed to her excited senses to be moving about the bed:

almost she could have thought that her mother had been there before her, to turn over the wedding clothes of her daughter that lay on the bed.

But she put away the fancy; for she had a purpose in her mind. There before her lay all that she had chosen from among the surprising quantity of things that the forty shillings she had handed to Michael had bought for her in Dublin.

She set the candles on the shelf, and fetched out her mother's big shears, and then, putting aside a little pile of linen, she took up the dress she was to wear the next day.

Her face was pale now and very sad. She wore no bride's look as she turned over the soft white gown.

Michael had tried her much that evening. His fits of unrestrained passion had frightened her, his deep depression had chilled her, and again his anguish of mournful loving-kindness had gone to her heart.

To-night her increasing doubt was turned to conviction: the blessing of the Almighty was not with them. She bitterly regretted that she had not fled to the home her uncle had offered her, without stopping to tell Michael. Now it was too late, and she had to deal with a desperate man, and desperate she knew not why.

The pretty dress of soft white stuff was all over frills and panniers and adornments of every kind. Sheila took up her great scissors and gravely began to cut them off. "When my heart is sad," she

thought, "I will wear no folly on my back." And she cut and ripped till the floor was strewn with bows and frills. Then she turned her attention to the broad-leafed hat of white straw, and boldly cut off the plumes that decorated it.

That done she looked with some dismay at the ruins upon the bed. "But I will not make myself a sight neither!" she said, and, going into the kitchen, she fetched out a tin can and fresh polished the bottom of it, as she had often done before. For the little mirror that the cottage possessed was cracked down the middle, and in its best days had made her face a terror to her, wider than it was long, with a mouth that stretched from ear to ear. She set the tin can end first on the dresser shelf, with a light on either side of it; then, sitting down with her needle, sewed and stitched for a while.

There was a light-handed nicety in all Sheila did: before the candles had burned out, the dress and hat were ready. She put them on in the inner room, and then came out to look at herself.

It was a pity she had no better glass. She looked into the tin can and then went to the cracked mirror, and then came back to the tin can again, for it showed her off best after all.

But it gave back but a blurred and crazy image of her delicate beauty. The dress, relieved of fanciful ornament, fell in long straight folds about her feet; the wide hat she had tied with silken strings beneath her chin, and it framed well the pure simplicity of her face. But nothing of all this could

Sheila see as she turned and turned about between her ungrateful mirrors.

As she stood there she heard a loud scratching at the door: it was Magra, who had come back from seeing Michael home to Tallat. Of late he had seemed divided in his affections and quite as content to follow one as the other. Sheila had missed him that evening and now went quickly to the door; but the dog bounded sideways with a yelp of dismay on seeing the brilliantly white figure that opened to him. Sheila's voice called him back, but he was nervous and came doubtfully enough, and seemed not at ease till Sheila had changed her gown. Then she blew out the lights and, making up a bright blaze on the hearth, sat down by the dog, with her arm about him.

There the two sat together till midnight, gazing at the glowing turf and flying sparks; and when a brighter flame sprang up, Magra would suddenly turn his head and lick away the tears that rolled from time to time down his companion's cheek.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WEDDING DAY

THURSDAY morning was still and dark. The late October fog hung chill in the valleys and trailed about the hills.

Sheila had slept little and had risen by candle-light, and when Theresa came to help her, she found fire and candle burning and the cottage set in order.

When the time came that she must be ready, she put on her long white dress and folded away her short frock in the clothes-chest. Theresa was continually talking, but Sheila heard nothing that she said. Like a person in a dream she went about her tasks.

She had chosen to be married in the little chapel on the cross-roads where she used to go with her mother. Father O'Brien wished to marry them, and he and Michael were to come up from Tallat and walk the two miles over the hill with Sheila.

As the time drew near, she got out her mother's long red-hooded cloak and hung it on her shoulders, and on her head she tied her hat.

Then she went to the door to look for Michael,

and in a few minutes she saw the two figures come up the path.

Michael was dressed in a gallant suit of grey with a white vest. He held himself erect, and his face was cheerful with no sign of trouble on it.

Father O'Brien smiled and nodded when he saw Sheila standing ready in the door, and then, as he came nearer and saw her pale cheek and quivering lip, he gave her his blessing kindly and fatherly. Theresa bid them a voluble farewell, and then they went up over the hill, Sheila walking quietly by Michael's side, while he and the priest talked together.

The service in the small bare chapel was short and quickly over; Father O'Brien said only a few words to them full of kindness and sympathy. The old priest, who had known Sheila as a child, looked from one to the other all the time, unable to suppress his astonishment.

"Well!" he said at last. "God bless ye both. Ye make a very good attempt at it, the two of ye. But mind now to be humble in the day of your prosperity. How long is it, my daughter, since you were running with bare feet over the hill beyond?"

"Since yesterday, father," said Sheila, smiling.

"That's right, that's right," said he heartily. "Good-bye and I wish ye joy." And he stood to see them going back the way they had come.

As they came near to Tallat, Sheila's agitation grew till she could scarcely guide her feet in the

way. Michael felt her tremble and held her arm firmly within his, as they reached a wicket gate that led them by a side path into the front avenue.

The house was before them, low and rambling and ivy-grown, with lawns and gravelled walks spread out around the approach. There was no time for her to look about, for Michael led her straight over the step and into the hall.

Johnny, the yard-boy, had been posted as a scout, and the servants were all standing there to welcome the master and mistress.

They had none of them seen Sheila, but they knew all about her very well indeed, and there was not one but felt a certain jealousy and irritation at her humble birth that was to bring discredit on the family of Power.

So it was a very keen-eyed and critical assembly that stood there curtseying and bowing and saying, "Welcome, and welcome, and welcome home!"

Fortunately for Sheila, there is a gentleness of heart which is very nearly allied to gentility: and where a toss of her head and a sweep of her skirt might have made for her a houseful of contemptuous enemies, her disposition won them all for friends.

For when Michael led her in and said, "Thanks for your welcome, and here is your young mistress," Sheila made not a moment's pause, but left his arm and went forward and gravely shook hands with them. She looked kindly at each one, as she

said, "Good day to you," to all in turn; but when she came to the little scullery maid, who was about her own age and who had a friendly round face and large dark eyes, she suddenly gave her the greeting in Irish as she took her by the hand. "God and Mary to you," she said; and every man and woman answered together, "God and Mary to you, and St. Patrick." Michael's face shone with pleasure as he too came forward and shook them by the hand, and every one said a kind word to him of Sheila, for they were touched by her youth and her sweet face and simple demeanour.

Then the old housekeeper came forward. "Come, my dear," she said, "and I will show you your room." And Sheila gladly went away with her. She was a tall commanding-looking person who had been nurse to Michael's mother. She was handsomely dressed in black with six wonderful light grey curls at each ear, and her head was furnished in black lace.

She talked very kindly to Sheila as she led her up the wide dark staircase and across a passage to a large front room, with long windows and a great bed.

"Oh, and is this my room?" cried Sheila. "I would rather have a little one: this is much too big."

"It is Master Michael who has arranged it all. You must speak to him," said the housekeeper, smiling indulgently.

Sheila went over to the middle window and

looked out, noticing idly the ivy-grown porch beneath. The housekeeper followed her and helped her to untie the strings of her hat, which Sheila's trembling fingers were struggling with.

In a motherly way she smoothed Sheila's short curls, and then bent down and kissed her forehead.

"Why," she said, "you're nothing but a child. Don't be frightened, my pretty one: you'll soon get used to the house and its ways, and be as happy at Tallat as the birds."

Downstairs luncheon was served in the hall, and Sheila must sit at table with Michael and Father O'Brien, not knowing in the least how to behave herself.

Luncheon over, the priest said good-bye and went, after giving them his blessing.

"Come, Sheila," said Michael, "get your hat and we will go out. I want to show you the place." His face was flushed and eager. Sheila had noticed that he had drunk many glasses of wine at table.

Sheila found her way upstairs, got her hat, and came quickly down, to hear that Michael had been called into another room on business.

"Well, then, I will go out by myself." said Sheila to old Gunyon, "and he can come after."

She went across the lawn and through a wicket gate, to the meadow that looked down on the river.

There was a fallen log near by a grove of trees, and Sheila sat down to think. Below her the trees about the river banks burned yellow and red.

Above the sky was a heavy grey, and the air was breathless and chill.

Sheila longed for a gleam of sunshine: the house of Tallat was very, very grand she thought, but it seemed cheerless. She liked the servants, but what a strange look old Gunyon had given her as she went out!

Then her quick eye caught sight of something moving down among the trees. Why it was she did not know, but in a moment she was frightened. She rose up, hesitating, and turned to go back to the house; then suddenly wheeled round, and went on towards the river.

CHAPTER XXVI

DISCOVERY

WHEN Sheila got down among the bushes she almost laughed, so great was her relief when she saw what the movement had been.

For there was Mick-a-Dandy below, upon his knees by the river, now running very low among its stones.

Light as Sheila's step was, he had heard it, and, without moving from his hands and knees, he had twisted his head round over his shoulder and was looking up at her.

His red coat was spread out on the stones, and he seemed to have been washing it. His head and beard were very wild; his shirt was torn, and his bare shoulder shone through the rent as white as snow.

There was something strange and furtive in his attitude, like that of a hound that is caught out hunting for himself.

Sheila came forward a step or two, and called him twice by his name.

The first time she called, he cowered down

behind a bush, but at the second call he sprang up and, hurriedly putting on his coat, came towards her.

"Why, Mick-a-Dandy!" said Sheila. "Where have you been all this while? Often and often I have wanted to see you."

"Ah, sure," he said, "'tis Miss Sheila; and there was I thinkin' it was an angel out of the sky!"

"Sheila took his hand, cold and wet from the water, into her own two, and looked up into his face. His pale blue eyes were troubled and his look distraught.

"What at all are ye doin' down here in them grand white clothes?" he said.

"Well, and you ought to know, Mick-a-Dandy. I was married this morning to Michael Power," said Sheila, blushing red.

"Ah, do ye tell me that, now?" he said, looking at her curiously. "And is it safe married you are? Priest and ring and all?"

For answer Sheila held up her finger with its plain gold band.

"Ay, it's rale gold; ye've done very well. But, troth," he went on with a loud laugh, "I've done it better. Look at here what old Gunyon give me. And out of the lining of his coat he took a little packet of leather which, after a cautious glance round, he unrolled, showing Sheila five golden guineas.

"There!" he said in triumph; "what d'ye think of that, now? It'll bury Mick-a-Dandy like a lord!"

Then hastily putting up the money, he went on in a tone of wild melancholy: "It's comin' soon, my time is, Sheila. And that it may come! I'm ready for it, if it's God's good will." Then suddenly dropping his voice to a whisper, he said in her ear, "Whisht! did Michael take ye to see the Place yet, honey?"

"He was coming this very minute to show me," answered Sheila. "But he was wanted in the house."

"Come along, then; I was just goin' there meself," he said, beginning to lead the way along by the river. "Old Gunyon's mad angry if he ketches me, but I go there every day. The young nettles is comin' up beautiful—and why wouldn't they? Sure that's what they come of—sorrow and sin. Where there's blood and tears on the clay, Sheila, ... that's where the nettles grow.... Did ever ye see an ould cabin, Sheila, with a broken roof, without the nettles were standin' round the hearthstone? It's often I could have cried to see them meself, Sheila,... thinkin' it was the tears of the father and mother and little childer that made them grow that way.... And that's why the sting is in the nettle-leaves, Sheila. And sure here they are now, hosts of them.... I declare to God ye'd think they were all standin' round to look.... This is the Place, agra; ye see it's gettin' green. Weary on the old coat." And he stood still, to rub his coat-sleeve. "The colour'll never be right again. ... Sure, the blood was pourin' from him as we

carried him down the hill. . . . It's a strong arm has Master Michael."

While he talked on in disconnected phrases with pauses between, he had guided Sheila along by the river bank, a rough and difficult way, to a hollow in a long piece of waste ground that seemed as if it might have been an old watercourse. A low ruined wall ran along the side nearest to them.

Sheila looked and listened in silence, a growing horror settling down upon her; she leaned down upon the old wall, her bursting heart almost refusing to beat.

It seemed as if she had always known of this place, or had seen it in her dreams of late: the rough underwood, the broken wall, the tall nettles trampled about, and the awful space between.

It was as though some dark cloud she had long watched upon the horizon had suddenly taken wings and flown upon her, a solid blackness.

Mick-a-Dandy turned his pale wandering eyes upon her.

" You don't like the Place, Sheila dear? Ye look to be takin' it very hard, honey. Ah, well, it was the same way with Master Michael. . . . Gunyon and me, we thought he'd have died that night when the buryin' was done. . . . And it was the same with me, Sheila, . . . when the dark come on again and the look of them bloody black nettles was there in me mind. . . . I ran that night, Sheila,—I ran from dark till morning, and I've never been the same man since. I went clean out of me rason—God

knows I never had much . . . but it was enough for a natural.

"You'll be comin' here again, alanna: I know you will. Master Michael comes here, and old Gunyon. . . . I do be watchin' them behind the bushes. But old Gunyon drives me off like a dog when he ketches me . . . and even Michael looks crooked at me to what he did. Nothin's the same, Sheila, . . . nothin's the same as it was. I'm tired of me life, agra, and I don't care how soon me time comes to be lyin' down."

His melancholy voice, that fell on Sheila's ear like the strokes of a bell, dropped into a silence that was only disturbed by the rustle of the brightly coloured leaves as they fluttered and fell through the bushes.

Suddenly there was a savage exclamation from the bank above, and old Gunyon ran down upon Mick-a-Dandy with a stick in his hand raised ready to strike.

"Mother of God!" said Mick-a-Dandy and fled off, looking sideways as he ran, like a dog that hears a stone bounding at his heels.

Then Gunyon came on down to Sheila in great excitement.

"This is no place for you, Miss Sheila," he said. "Come away into the house, ma'am. Mick-a-Dandy is out of his mind this long time. There's no end to his tales, and we're goin' to have him put up."

Sheila made no answer. When he had finished

speaking she leaned down over the wall, her face the colour of her gown, her hand to her throat where her breath was labouring.

Gunyon fell into powerful distress. Tears and sobs were in his voice as he spoke:

"Miss Sheila, don't take on like that; don't take on, now. Dhivil run off with Mick-a-Dandy! Sure, the poor master couldn't help it. He was bound to do it. And his heart is half broke and more. And he's the last of the Powers of Tallat, and all the hope of the house is on you, Miss Sheila, for the master's heart is terrible set on ye, and small wonder. And this his wedding day, may the Lord pity us! Say naught to him, Miss Sheila, say naught about it. He's had a hard life. Let him have his bit of happiness and it'll be all right between ye the morrow's morn." The tears rolled down his cheeks as he pleaded with her, but Sheila only turned away her head.

Her body was fainting, but her mind, frenzied and working beyond her control, was dealing with her new situation. From point to point her memory flew, knitting and weaving the past together. Again she saw Michael strike Hawks beside the well, again she saw his passion on the hill; picture after picture flew before her eyes, till at last the chain was complete, and turning round her head to Gunyon and pointing with one finger, she spoke in a whisper:

"Then Mr. Hawks is down under there?"

"Ay, is he," said the old man stoutly. "And a good job too."

Sheila's head sank down. Gunyon was frightened.

"Hold up, Miss Sheila, hold up. Will I get ye a sup of water or somethin'? Is it very bad ye are?"

Sheila made no sign. Gunyon got hastily over the wall and ran down towards the river. Then Sheila raised herself up. Her mind was clear. Reason had no part in her determination. It was instinct alone that compelled her.

She took off her wedding ring and cast it among the nettles. Then she stood up on her feet and, gathering her white gown together, flew up the meadow, straight as a swallow before the frost.

CHAPTER XXVII

POWER OF TALLAT

As Sheila neared the house, the one idea in her mind was that she would get her mother's red cloak to cover her dress, and that then she would flee out of the place.

But as she reached the hall, Michael came in from another door.

"Ah, Sheila!" he called, full of delight, with an eager face, like one that sees the end of his journey.

He came quickly forward, then stood still, checked by Sheila's look. She was drawing away from him with a white face of horror, her eyes widely open and fixed, her hands held up toward.

As she drew away silently, Michael, too, stepped slowly backwards, as though driven from her by an unseen hand. Across the empty space they still gazed at each other, till his face grew as pale as her own. For her shrinking figure and all her look was like a printed scroll in which he could read his own sad fate. There a young love was blasted and smitten like early buds frost-killed in May.

At last, holding out his hands, he called to her

in a dreadful voice: "Sheila, where have you been?"

Sheila tried to tell him, but instead other words came from her in a low whisper:

"Good-bye, Michael. Oh, Michael, good-bye. I am going away from this place."

For a moment there was silence, then, "Listen to me, Sheila," he cried to her. "I killed him, but, before God, I had no murder in my heart. He struck me first and said foul words, and I did not know my passion or my strength was so great. Only one blow I gave him, Sheila, with my bare fist, and it dropped him down. And but the moment before I was blessing you in my heart. Sheila, Sheila, have pity on me! Would you tear the soul out of my body?"

"I do pity you, Michael, but I cannot stay indeed," and she turned towards the door.

"Stop, Sheila!" he said. "Where would you go? Do you forget this morning?" And he took a step towards her.

"Come no nearer me," she said, pointing into the empty air: "there is mortal sin between us. I must go, Michael. If I stayed in this place, I would die."

"And where would you go?" he said, with a threatening look.

"I do not know," she stammered, "and indeed I would not tell you, for fear that you would come after me."

"You talk like a child," he answered, with an

angry face, then pausing and taking a step near her while she took a step back: "Now listen," he said more gently, "don't be too hard on me, Sheila. Try and forgive me, and I will ask nothing of you and serve you on my bended knees." He stepped up to her and took her by the two shoulders. "My dear," he said, speaking with deep intensity, "you would forgive me if you could know what I have suffered. I have lain and eaten the bare ground in my misery."

There is no living creature so cruel to sinners as a sinless young maid; she shrunk away from him.

"Don't touch me," she said, and a dry sob shook her. "Your hand is wicked; I will not bear the touch of it."

Michael let her go with a curse and walked to the window, then turned as he heard Sheila slipping across the floor.

He went after her and spun her round till she faced him.

"Wait a bit, my little madam," he said; "do you forget that you're my wife?" Then noticing her bare hand he said sternly,

"Where is your ring?"

"I left it down at the place among the nettles," whispered Sheila, trembling. "Michael, you should have told me before we were married. I am not your wife in the sight of God."

"Begad, you have a fine spirit!" said Michael grimly, "but you've met your master." And as

he spoke he lifted her suddenly from her feet. Sheila's slender form was like a willow wand in his hands. She offered no resistance, and he carried her swiftly up the stairs and into her room, and laid her gently down on the bed. Then he looked long and tenderly into her wan face; she gazed back at him, her throat panting, her wounded spirit looking out of her large grey eyes. It was the look of a caught wild creature that will face death many times rather than suffer its captor's kindness. Michael's heart was pierced.

"My poor Sheila," he said in pity, "my heart's treasure! Rest there as long as you will. But remember, I will never let you go," and he left the room, locking the door behind him.

All that afternoon Michael paced up and down the long hall, enduring great anguish of mind. Passion and pity, remorse and anger by turns possessed him, scourging him body and soul. But in the back of his mind was a sense of triumph. Lock and key, he had her, his darling. He walked up and down, now slow and now fast, in his handsome wedding clothes, a desperate man, and old Gunyon trembled before him as he told the tale of how he had found Sheila down by the river with Mick-a-Dandy telling her all.

Once Michael went up with a dark face and stood at Sheila's door; his hand was on the lock when an echo of his father's voice came distinctly to his ear, saying, "I married her against her will, and she was like an adder in my bosom." And

down he went again to resume his miserable pacing.

Presently he sent for the housekeeper, and after speaking to her with shut doors, sent her up with food and drink for Sheila. She came downstairs again, crying and carrying an untouched tray.

"The poor young mistress is very bad, sir," she said. "She's sittin' there by the window like a ghost, and she won't eat a bit or speak but to say her 'thank you.' Many's the sad day I've seen come to Tallat, but deed'n this beats them all."

With the dark the wind rose suddenly, sounding in all the chimneys and walls. An unbearable longing seized upon Michael; his nerves had been terribly shaken of late, and the sound of the wind tortured his loneliness.

It was about eight o'clock when he went slowly upstairs and waited before Sheila's room. Hesitatingly he at last turned the key in the lock and opened the door.

A great buffet of wind met him. Within all was dark and empty; the tall window was wide open, and the wind rushed through the room, past where he stood, and on down the stairs and passages, slamming the doors and putting out the lights.

In the pale windows Michael could see the outlines of the tossing woods.

And out into such a night as that his young love had fled for fear of him. Sheila was no more his friend, and all his wooing was undone.

It was blow upon blow. Strong man as he was, Michael's head reeled, and he fell and lay like dead.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FLIGHT

THE instant Michael had left the room, Sheila had slid from the bed, and noiselessly crossed the floor to the centre window. It was tall and narrow. She fetched a chair and tried the fastening. It yielded, and she found that by exerting all her strength she could raise the heavy frame. The porch had a steeply inclined roof, the eaves of which were about eighteen feet from the ground. The sky was very dark and an early dusk already coming on. She cautiously shut the window, replaced the chair, and went and sat in a low seat by the farthest window.

Presently the housekeeper came in: her face was greatly troubled, and she spoke to Sheila in a whispering voice. "Don't you go for to stand up against Master Michael, my dear," she said. "There never yet was a Power that didn't get his own way in his own house, and Master Michael is as bad as any of them, for all we thought him so quiet. Cheer up, now; black is the day, but you are young, and it will go over like the rest."

Sheila made no answer, only leaned down her head on the good woman's arm, till she at last got up and went away. When she was gone, Sheila listened till all was quiet and dark, then she put on her cloak, pulling the hood over her head. Without a moment's hesitation she opened the window, crept on to the broad sill, and then let herself down on to the narrow ridge of the porch roof.

She had an instant's horrible fear, as she let go the window-sill; then, by leaning on the house-wall, she managed to slip and slide on her face down the sloping incline, till her feet reached the gutter. Then she swung herself round, caught her hands in the leaden pipe, and dropped over the edge, missing her foothold as she reached the ground, and falling on the gravel.

She was bruised and frightened, and lay still holding her breath, for fear they should have heard her in the hall. Then out of the dusk some creature rushed at her and thrust a cold nose into her face. It was Magra, who, not finding her in the house, had gone out to look for her, and was wild with delight when he found her.

Sheila sat up and put her arms round him; then getting upon her feet, she gathered up her gown and pulled the red cloak, that looked black in the dusk, over every white fold. Magra bounded back and fore and seemed impatient to be gone. Sheila, remembering that she could only guess the way out of Tallat and would be sure to lose herself, decided to follow him till she had got safe away.

Her one idea was to get as far as she could from the spot she had seen that morning. Some vague notion she had of walking the fifty miles to Kilgobnet, but her instinct was to escape to some place where she could hide her sorrow from every human creature.

She crept along in the dusk after Magra, who bounded before her, disappearing for a moment, then with a rush and a pant appearing out of the darkness at her side again. The white plume of his upcurled tail was all that she could see of him in the dark, and it served as a little lamp to guide her steps into the gloom.

The Tallat dogs barked as she crept across the lawn like a thief; fortunately for her, the wolfhounds, who had turned savage since John Power's death, were kept on their chains.

It was a difficult path by which Magra led her, and she often stumbled and stood stock-still, trembling and wringing her hands, and fearing to venture further. The night was full of terror for her. Dark shapes seemed to approach her and then melt into shadow. The sound of her own feet on the ground was loud in her ears. The sky was very dark above, and under the trees it was as black as midnight; but the dog had no fear, and evidently could see where Sheila could not.

At last, after a wandering that seemed hours long, the ground beginning to rise very steeply, Sheila stood once more, to try and penetrate the darkness and make out where she could be. She

had a sense of homelessness and bewilderment, like that of nightmare. Magra was now excited, running forward and then back again and leaping upon her skirt. At last, as she strained her eyes upward, she seemed to catch a familiar outline against the sky. She was upon her own hill; her own cottage was there above her, and Magra was taking her home.

It was like the sudden waking from a terrifying dream. Taking heart, Sheila went swiftly up the path, Magra galloping by her side, and soon reached her door. A white shape was moving about it, and Sheila started; but soon her ears taught her it was her own white goat, which had run from Theresa and come up in the darkness to seek her familiar shelter.

The creature seemed uneasy and pushed up against Sheila as she fumbled for the key behind a stone at the window; and when at last the door was opened, she obstinately made her way in.

"There is a heavy storm coming," thought Sheila, "and she is frightened."

Once more the three companions found themselves together, and a light burned again on the hearth of the little cottage that had stood so forsaken all that day on the hill.

Once again Sheila had to go through her accustomed tasks, put aside that morning, as she thought, for ever. While she milked the goat and drove her to her shed and gave Magra his food, she knew that her fear and sorrow were waiting

for her, and she went softly, as they go about a house whose dead is waiting in an upper room.

Before she went to her tasks she had taken off her white gown and laid it down, and carefully smoothed its folds, and put on her coarse dress again.

When all was done and her companions were satisfied, she wrapped herself in her mother's cloak, and lay down along the cold clay floor, for despair seeks always the lowest place for a pillow. Utterly desolate, she plunged in misery as in a sea whose waves were one by one overtaking her.

Outside the threatened storm was already in motion; the first note of the rising wind sounded like a strange foot at the door. Magra crept to her side with a low whine, laying his head down on a corner of her cloak.

She put out her hand to soothe him, remembering how they two had sat together the night before, and her lighter trouble,—vague forebodings, and maiden's fears.

To-night she had no tears to shed: her anguish went too deep. Her unhappy memory brooded continually down by the ruined wall among the nettles, or pictured Michael's face as it had looked for one moment cruelly upon her, wounding her to the centre of her heart.

The wind outside was fast rising to a storm. The fire burned low, and night hung like a black curtain at the window-pane. After each lull Sheila could hear the fresh gust thundering below among

the Tallat woods; then it rose, billow after billow, pouring itself upon the hillside, mounting higher and higher, till at last it went flying far overhead in a shrill scream.

Every sound the wind can make was there, from the deep note of thunder to the whistling shriek that passed away into a note so fine that Sheila's ears could not overtake it.

It was as though every pipe of a monstrous organ were sounding at once, under the striking of some outrageous hand.

Sudden blasts of rain beat for a moment against the cottage walls and window-pane; but the huge cloud-masses overhead had no chance to cease from their travelling, but were driven tumbling away on their wild journey over sea.

Sheila's spirit was as restless as the storm. As the cottage trembled under the shock of the wind, and the fire was scattered on the hearth, she got up from where she lay and heaped the turves together again, and paced the floor while she listened.

It seemed as though her happiness and her hope, her youth and her delight were being swept crying over the hill, with the sweet summer that had stayed too long.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN THE MORNING

A COMFORTLESS rough dawn followed on this night of storm. As the cold light paled on the window-pane, Sheila's courage ebbed and sank. This bleak reality was harder to be borne than the terrors of darkness.

She had laid herself down again on the cold floor, when a sudden step roused her, and she sprang up as a hasty hand tapped on the door. She opened at once, and Father O'Brien stood there. He greeted her kindly and gently, for she made a pitiful picture as she stood there in the low doorway, her soft young face spoiled with sorrow, her hair in tumbled curls, and her red cloak about her.

She bade him enter, but he would not sit down and spoke at once, resting one hand by the chimney and leaving the door open.

"I made sure," he said, "I should find you here. I am come to take you home with me to Tallat."

Sheila looked at him with questioning eyes; she was astonished and somewhat alarmed.

"I have heard Michael Power's confession," he

said in answer to her look. "I am satisfied of his repentance, and that it was under great provocation that he struck that unhappy blow. You must go back to him, daughter, and share in the burden of his penitence. It was not only for joy, Sheila, that the church joined you together yesterday."

He stopped and looked at her, awaiting her reply. She made none. Her hands were clasped together, and she was looking down upon the floor.

"Go, then," said the priest, "and make yourself ready to come with me."

"I cannot go down to Tallat, father," said Sheila faintly. "I cannot bear that terrible place."

"*Cannot?*" said the priest. "And what sort of a word is that from a wife's lips? You cannot do your duty? You cannot stand at your husband's side except the weather be fair? You will destroy him and think no shame? That is not the woman's part, Sheila. I will take no such answer from you."

A deep red spot appeared in Sheila's cheek.

"Father," she said steadily, "I begged and prayed of Michael Power to put off our marriage. I begged and prayed of him to tell me his trouble, and he would not. It was not from him that I found out the truth. It was a murderer's hand I took in the church, and that hand I will not touch again. I will sooner destroy myself."

Father O'Brien was both surprised and incensed by the intensity of her determination. He waited a moment before he spoke.

"It is a pity," he said at last coldly, "to find

so bitter a self-will in so young a girl. You will have many a sore heart before you learn humility. Now I will ask you a question or two, and I expect a fair and honest answer. What was the quarrel between Michael Power and young Mr. Hawks?"

Sheila moved uneasily. "Indeed it was about some... rudeness Mr. Hawks... offered to me, I think."

"You saw Michael Power strike Mr. Hawks in your presence one day?"

"Yes, father."

"Did you warn Michael Power then, and bid him never to strike a man again for your sake?"

Sheila was silent.

"And why and by whose leave," went on Father O'Brien, "was Michael Power watching that night on the hill? Answer that to your own conscience. And before you renounce your duties, tell yourself it is the part of a tigress to set men by the ears, but not of a Christian maid." He and Sheila were so absorbed that they never noticed a shadow pass the cottage pane, nor a step come slowly to the door.

"You cannot," he went on, "approve the motive and shirk the consequences that follow. Before God you are equally responsible for Michael Power's sin."

These were the first words of rebuke Sheila had ever heard, and the hearing was odious to her.

She looked back at the young priest who stood

there by her hearth with a spirit to the full as stubborn as his own.

"And if I am," she said, "I will go away by myself, and make my own repentance; but down to that place I will not go."

In the silence that followed they looked up, and there was Michael Power standing in the doorway.

"Let her alone, father," he said; "I will not have her scolded. She is right enough, and she shall do as she pleases."

Sheila took one glance at him: he was looking at her very kindly. A storm of sobs overcame her, and she pulled her cloak about her and turned and hid her face in the wall.

Michael thought she turned away in fear of him.

"Come, father," he said, "we will be going. It is no fault of hers, and you were too hard upon her. I will trouble her no more. In a little while she shall be as free as when I first saw her. I will give myself up this very day: it is the only way out of our trouble. And anyway I am a broken man."

There was silence for a moment. Father O'Brien looked from one to the other.

He turned to Sheila, and then, "God forgive you," he said bitterly, and strode out of the cottage, and Michael followed him, leaving Sheila still standing leaning by the wall.

But in a moment she heard footsteps returning, that crossed the floor and stood at her side. Then she felt two arms that wrapped her round; a light

kiss fell on the hood that covered her head, and Michael's voice said low in her ear,

"Good-bye, Sheila, my darling and my only love! You need not have run from me, my dear: I would never have hurt you. Good-bye now, for ever and ever."

She was going to turn, and she was going to speak, but her weeping choked her and she delayed too long.

It was only when Michael was gone that she began to realize what purpose was in his mind.

CHAPTER XXX

MICHAEL POWER RIDES

MICHAEL POWER left Tallat shortly after noon on the same day, having put his affairs in order, and having told his household that he was going on a journey to a short distance.

He felt more his own man than he had done ever since that fatal night.

In the greatest extremity of all, pain will sometimes cease. It is the first tasting of the cup that is so bitter; in the lowest dregs may be found even a kind of sweetness. And this was Michael's experience.

The nearest magistrate lived some ten miles away, and he had decided to visit him the same evening: that afternoon he kept for himself.

In him was something of the temper of one who is bound on a far journey, and who goes for the last time from room to room of a familiar house, looking eagerly round upon the walls, that he may fix an enduring image upon his brain of what is even now for him a picture of the past.

So Michael had his father's bay horse saddled, and rode off on his bitter errand in a kind of cheerful composure, intending to take by the way a fare-

well of all the country that was so dear to his heart and eyes.

By noon the wind had abated, leaving behind the cold bleakness it had brought. The upper air was still in rapid motion, and through the shifting masses of cloud, the light filtered in changing rays of steel.

The whole face of the country was altered by the storm; summer and autumn had vanished at a clap, and winter was coming down from the north.

Michael had promised himself to ride a long round by the Gurt and Port Drothan roads, past the little hamlet of Rathbawn with its hurling-field where he had been used to play; thence to a cross-roads one fork of which would carry him direct to Castle Lyne, where lived Sir Rawleigh Monsell, to whom his errand lay.

Riding slowly, he looked to right and left of him, studying bog and field, hills and woods and the distant farms more keenly than he had ever done before.

Now and then he turned in his saddle and gazed back the way he had come: there the clouds were dragging their skirts over Sheila's beautiful hills.

Under his horse's feet the sodden leaves lay in heaps, the splendid mantle of summer fouled in the mire.

He stopped his horse by a small bridge that crossed the Carron on its broader way to the sea, and gazed at the little river; it, too, was changed; robbed of its summer emerald, it ran brown be-

tween its banks. Here and there patches of grey light shone on the hurrying water, like windows opened to the flood. Down by the river he had spoken first with Sheila; it was down by the river that now lay the seal of his fate.

In the fields around, the trees stood almost leafless, fast falling into their winter sleep. Beneath them, where the sun in summer had cast down a shadow shape upon the grass, the same grass, paler now, was painted bronze by the leaves that trembled in the wind.

With a sigh Michael gave his impatient horse the rein: it would be a long winter and a hard one, he thought. And he wondered if Sheila would be warm in her uncle's house in Kilgobnet.

A cold chill began to creep about his heart, as he thought of the winter fire and Sheila's face. But he shook it off and pulled himself together, and almost smiled as he thought that now he knew how wandering spirits feel when they come back and look through the window-pane.

On reaching the hamlet, he put up his horse for an hour at the poor inn and walked down to the hurling-field. The last time he played there he had never seen Sheila, and he well remembered his mortification at being about the worst-dressed man among the peasants on the ground. He took a glass of ale from the woman at the inn, who curtsied deeply but failed to recognise him.

As he rode away he felt no envy of his former self. Bad as his case was, he could not separate

himself from it; he could as soon accuse the sunlight as Sheila. For himself the chastisement of any law would be mercy compared with the unbridling of those passions he had felt stir within him.

As he thought it, he topped the hill beyond which was the cross-roads. Away in the distance lay the sea, and the air was fresh and keen.

Slowly he descended the hill, and walked his horse to the cross-roads, reining him up there, while he waited to take his farewell of the sun, a free man,—for the last time.

Over the sea there was a red glow behind the heavy clouds that moved past the sunset. As Michael waited there, at the turning-point in his destiny, earth and sky appeared to him full of signs and wonders. The clouds shifted and the red glow increased; it spread up the sky and across the face of the country, and was repeated in every pool, till the water on the road seemed in patches as red as blood.

Then before his watching eyes the gate of the sunset low down on the horizon appeared to open; from it a shaft of light slid out, and sped across the water towards him. It narrowed to a point as it ran, flaming and glittering on the uneven waves, like the sword of the Almighty, outstretched from the west.

Michael took it for a sign. He turned his horse to the road upon the left, and set him at a gallop down to Castle Lyne.

CHAPTER XXXI

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

MICHAEL was shown by a man servant into a large and handsomely furnished library. At any other time he would have been ill at ease, but now a deep anxiety overcame his shyness.

There was a moderate amount of state maintained at Castle Lyne; fires and candles burned brightly, the house was well appointed, and from the back passages stole an atmosphere that suggested an excellent table.

In a very few minutes a little gentleman in neat black bustled into the room. He had a well-filled presence, a round jolly face, a bald head, and an air of consequence.

"How d'ye do, sir? How d'ye do?" he said, looking curiously at Michael. "I knew your father well, but never to my knowledge had the pleasure of meeting you. You must give me the honour of your company at dinner, which—" and he pulled out a gold watch—"will be on the table in ten—minutes—precisely. Lady Monsell will, I know, be pleased to make your acquaintance."

"You are very good, sir," said Michael; "but I am here, I am sorry to say, on a bad business. When you have heard me you will not want to ask me to dinner."

Sir Rawleigh fell into an extraordinary state of agitation. He plucked out his watch again.

"My dear sir," he said, "punctuality is the rule of my house. My cook waits for no one. My business is all transacted during the morning hours. Pardon me if I ask you to be brief in your communication."

Watch in hand he stood on the hearth-rug. Michael's tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

Sir Rawleigh looked at him in some irritation.

Michael made an effort and, resting his hands on the back of a chair, said plainly.

"Well, then, sir, here is my business as brief as I can make it: I hit a man the other night, and had the misfortune to kill him."

Sir Rawleigh stared.

"The devil you did!" said he. "And pray what use am I to make of this communication?"

"The use the law allows, sir," said Michael.

Sir Rawleigh rang the bell. It was answered immediately by the same man servant, with a face at once humourous and sympathetic.

"Falvey," he said, "inform Lady Monsell that I shall be detained by pressing business till five minutes after six—pre-cisely. Let Atkinson know, and ask her to use every precaution. The soup may not suffer, but five minutes will ruin the birds,

unless she gives them her whole attention—her *entire* attention."

"Certainly, sir," said Falvey, with an air of concern as he backed out of the door.

"Now, Mr. Power," said Sir Rawleigh gravely, "I am at your service for thirteen minutes—precisely. May I ask who the man was that you—disposed of in this manner?"

"Young Hawks of Killaraa," said Michael.

"God bless my soul, you don't say so!" said Sir Rawleigh. "And what did you do it for?"

"I never meant it, sir," said Michael. "We had a quarrel, and I struck him one blow and it finished him."

"Was there anybody present but you two?"

"Only Mick-a-Dandy the fool," said Michael.

"Not at all a bad witness," said Sir Rawleigh. "Now, my dear fellow, as a friend, will you tell me the nature of your quarrel?"

Michael hesitated. "You knew my father, sir, and perhaps you know there was bad feeling always between him and Killaraa. It was their bullying and impertinence that put my father in the rage that cost him his life. And then young Hawks was going about to offer violence to . . . a young girl . . . whom I married yesterday. That was what he was up to that unfortunate night. He had smashed her house for her some days before, and I met him by there again. We had some words about it, and then he slashed at me with his cane, and I believe I insulted him, and then he said—I

don't know if I'm right to tell you, Sir Rawleigh?" And he looked questioningly at the little baronet; then, meeting a friendly and considerate look, went on: "He said that I was interfering with a family custom; that the women of Tallat had always been common property with Killaraa." Sir Rawleigh gave a loud whistle. "That cut me, sir, for I still remember my mother. After that the next thing that I knew was that he was lying on the ground, and he wasn't long in dying after that."

"Ay, you're a powerful-built chap," said Sir Rawleigh. "And you say he struck you first?"

"He did; but that was nothing. It was what he said after.... For I knew there was some story...." Michael could say no more; he looked at Sir Rawleigh and held his breath.

"Never fret about that, my boy," answered he kindly. "Your father was not that sort. He'd have cut your mother's head off first, and never turned a hair. She had a fancy for Hawks, it's true, but she never had a chance. Now," he went on, "I'll be quite frank with you. That young Hawks was as big a blackguard as you could meet. There's been a couple of us spoiling to hang him, ever since the Eliza Foley business. And then there was young Patrick Corrigan, a fine lad, and a great pity of that affair. The man was nothing else but an outlaw, but we didn't like to disturb him because of the scandal and the difficulty of collecting evidence, for he always confined his attentions to his own tenants. And then he was the only son

of Killaraa, and of course he might have pulled round. So it was a good job you did for the country, though a nasty one for yourself. But you know no jury would bring it in anything but justifiable homicide, or perhaps manslaughter. He was too notorious and too well hated. So, begad, we'll just keep it quiet and say nothing about it."

Michael tried to speak, but he was considerably overcome. Sir Rawleigh made him sit down, and gave him some brandy out of a hunting-flask. Then he spoke more gravely.

"Now," he said, "I think none the worse of you for taking it seriously, and I am glad you came to me. If I were you, I would make up my mind to have done with all that sort of thing, and try and make some reparation in your own person—eh? You know what I mean? This has been for the last forty years the worst neighbourbood of any in the country. And the cause of it was just a gang of lads with foolish indulgent parents who let them do as they chose. There was old Mylotte and your father and Hawks and one of the Butlers; upon my word, there was no mischief too bad for them, and no decent young fellow had a chance. Your father was the best of the lot, I imagine; he was always a gentleman in his way. He let you have a rough time of it, I believe?"

"Well, he brought me up for a day-labourer, sir," said Michael.

"So I heard; so I heard. But nobody would think it. And a Catholic?"

"Yes," said Michael.

"H'm! Pity. And married yesterday! What sort of a girl have you married?"

"A farmer's daughter," said Michael. "Mick-a-Dandy told her yesterday of the—accident, and she was frightened and ran away out of Tallat."

"Ran away? God bless me, that's a strong measure! But if you married her without giving her a hint, you deserved something."

Here the door opened and a tall lady in a handsome dinner-gown came into the room.

"This is John Power's son, my dear," said Sir Rawleigh.

Lady Monsell shook him by the hand, and said a few kind words; then turning to her husband, "My dear Rawleigh," she said, "did you not hear the bell? it is full two minutes since it rang. The soup will be cold. Is Mr. Power giving us the pleasure of his company at dinner?"

"No, no, my dear," said the baronet, turning suddenly fidgety. "Mr. Power has had a little shake. It will be best for him to ride quietly home again. The night is fairly fine. Come and see me again another day and stay to dinner." And tucking Lady Monsell's arm into his own, he hurried from the room.

But half way downstairs his kind heart got the better of his appetite; he ran back with surprising agility, and going up to Michael, shook him warmly by the hand.

"You'll excuse me, won't you? My cook waits

for no one. And you don't look very fit. Ride over again to-morrow and we'll put you up for the night. There are one or two more questions I ought to ask you. Good-bye, good-bye!"

It was a neat chambermaid who came and told Michael that his horse was at the door. As he passed through the hall, a subdued murmur came from the dining-room, where Sir Rawleigh was giving his mournful consideration to a plate of soup which had suffered an almost perceptible chill.

CHAPTER XXXII

WATCHING

NEITHER glad nor sorry, Michael rode quickly home to Tallat. He was overpoweringly tired and sleepy; all his attention was given to aiding his nervous horse to keep out of the ditches, for there was little light abroad. He had, moreover, a sort of feeling as though he were being laughed at, as though the darkness hid faces that grinned by the road.

He was glad enough to see the lights of Tallat, and giving the horse his head, was at his own door.

Without replying to Gunyon's anxious looks, he snatched a hasty meal of bread and meat, and, with feet that stumbled on the stairs from excess of weariness, took his way up to his own garret-room. Once there, he flung himself, dressed as he was, upon the bed and fell into a deep sleep.

For five or six hours he slept without moving; then he began to stir in a troubled dream. He thought he was standing down by the river on a sunshiny day, and that opposite to him, on the further side, was Sheila. She was smiling and her bright eyes were wide open, while she called some-

thing to him that he could not understand. Again and again she called to him, always in the same words, and yet he could not hear.

He stirred uneasily and then suddenly awoke. All was dark, and outside a dog was howling. He turned again to sleep, but the dog still went on sending forth at intervals a long melancholy howl.

Michael sat up; his head was wonderfully refreshed and clear, and he began to think over his visit to Castle Lyne. It seemed to him strange that Sir Rawleigh should have made so little of what had covered himself and Sheila, Gunyon and Mick-a-Dandy, in despair. He thought of Sheila's horror; of the prayers and groans of old Gunyon that came from behind the closed door of the butler's pantry; of Mick-a-Dandy's crazy wildness, that threatened to turn to madness outright. He pictured again the terrible burying, and the three faces so pale and haggard that had not dared to look one at another. As he sat and thought of it, the conviction was borne in upon him that the anger of the Almighty rested upon them; upon soul and body it had fallen like a blight, and that they were bound to wither under it.

Then it occurred to him that the dog outside, instead of running to and fro and round about, as is the manner of beasts on their night expeditions, was evidently sitting still in one place to howl. This was something he had never known happen on a moonless night.

He got up, opened the window, and put out his

head. The night was cold and dark, and a drizzling rain was falling. Michael whistled and called the names of all the dogs over: Robin, Shepherd, Cæsar, Jupiter. There was no answering bark. Then by an afterthought he called Magra. A loud yelp answered him. "Now that's a clever dog," thought Michael; "he is not come here for nothing: something is surely wrong with Sheila."

An old horn lantern stood in the corner of his garret; he lit it and went downstairs, unbarred the front door, and went out into the rain. Magra rushed to him, and leaped up with his paws on his breast.

"Good dog!" said Michael. "Go on, then," and Magra ran on, taking the same way he had gone with Sheila the night before. Michael knew the path only too well, and he had the light of his lantern; he ran most of the way, and soon was on the rise of the hill.

There was no light in the cabin window. He tried the door: it was on the latch and opened easily enough. Inside the place was cold and dark. Michael stepped over the threshhold: the hearth was black, and a small lonesome voice came from the inner room.

"Father, father, is that you? I'm waitin' so long, and sick and tired of lyin' here by meself. Oh—" And the voice died away in a long murmur.

Magra pattered into the room and out again, inviting Michael to follow; after a moment's hesitation he stepped in and held up the lantern.

Sheila was sitting up in bed, dressed only in a white sleeveless shift. Her cheeks were bright crimson, her grey eyes seemed to shoot out light, and her curls were all tossed about her throat. Michael was almost stepping out again, fearing to offend her, when she called to him:

"Is that you, father?" she said. "And who was that by the door? Don't let Mick-a-Dandy in.... I don't want to see him any more.... His clothes are wet.... I'm cold here in the dark." She shivered violently, and began murmuring to herself.

Michael was hurrying away to light the fire, when she called aloud:

"Ah, can't you stop with me? Mother's gone, and now you're going. Come here till I tell ye," she said in a whisper, beckoning him. "There's a gallows in the town—and a man on it, hangin' dead. And it's I that's done it, and I'm goin' to tell my mother." Then she turned away from him impatiently, and bending down over the patchwork quilt, and tracing out the squares with her fingers. "This is thyme," she said slowly, "and this is heather;... and them's the little eyebrights;... and mammie's dead."

She turned round, and lay quietly down in the bed and fell into a sudden sleep. Michael came softly over and held up the light; she was lying carelessly, like a child, one smooth arm thrown over the quilt, and one hidden in her hair.

"The prettiest thing ever I saw," thought

Michael to himself. And there she must lie stricken for the sake of his sin. For he knew what the red cheek and the panting breath meant. He had seen a sick child fall asleep just so on its mother's lap by the fire, and it seemed to him that Sheila's fever was heavy enough.

Somebody had been in to look after her, he saw: Theresa most likely. There was a bitter-herb drink in a mug by her bedside, and milk in a bowl. But the cold hearth showed that she must have been long enough alone.

He went out and fetched dry kindling from the little shed, and turf from the rick; Sheila was awake and calling when he got back. He set his burden hastily down on the hearth and went to her. She was sitting up again and moaning sadly to herself. He held the bowl of milk to her lips, and she drank a little, and then turned suddenly to him and laid down her head on his breast. Michael's heart beat with anguish and delight, and he soothed and cherished her as a mother might have done, covering her bare throat and smoothing her tangled hair. She kept up a sighing, and with her fingers pulled at the buttons of his coat. Presently she spoke fretfully:

"I'm feared Mick-a-Dandy will come in.... Whist now and I'll tell you." And she looked mysteriously up at him. "Mick-a-Dandy has been and hid five golden rings in the nettles.... One, two, three, four, five.... It's all night I'm counting the whistles in the wind. There's a hundred and more.

and how can I count them when they're all goin' in me head at once?... What's the matter with me at all? Ah, kind Jesus, let me sleep!" She turded from hm and flung herself down on the bed.

Michael went and got the fire lit; then he stayed by her till morning, doing everything to ease her suffering that his mind could devise.

As soon as it was daylight, he left her asleep, and Magra lying by the side of the fire, and went over to Theresa's cottage. The door was locked and Theresa gone. Some poor soul had most likely sent for her in the night, thought Michael.

He went down to Tallat, dispatched a mounted messenger for the doctor, and then sent for Mrs. Faa.

Christian woman though she was, Michael found her hard to deal with. She had been shocked at Sheila's running away, and she was not going a foot up that hill. She retreated obstinately behind a respectful manner, and would not speak. At last Michael fell in a rage.

"Well," said he, "if anything happens to your young mistress, you will be to blame, and it will be better for your health if I never set eyes on you again."

"Dear, dear, sir! to be sure I'll go," said Mrs. Faa meekly, "and do my best for the poor young creature, too. Well, well, if it isn't a wonder to hear you talk like the poor gentleman, your papa, that's gone!" And away she went to make her-

self ready and to put together some things for Sheila.

"That's right, sir," said Gunyon admiringly, as he stood by the door. "That's the very way the old master had with him. She's as obstinate as a mule; but 'Pack your trunk, Mrs. Faa,' he'd say, and she'd melt like snow in the sun."

Once installed in Sheila's cottage, Mrs. Faa proved herself a kind and clever nurse. It was the fear of Michael kept her steady at first amid the unaccustomed wildness of her surroundings; but very soon it was for Sheila's sake she stayed, won by her helplessness and by the transparent purity of character that appeared in her wild but gentle talk.

For many days the fever lasted, and with each nightfall, Mrs. Faa returned down the hill to Tallat, and Michael came up to take his place at Sheila's bedside, following on where his longing and bitter fears had hovered all the day. The cabin never seemed to him what it did to the others: for him it was the shrine that enclosed his precious jewel, the one hope that lay between him and the desire of death. How deep a delight he had found in those nights of service in the dark cottage chamber he did not know till they were over.

One night, Sheila, after a longer sleep than usual, had begun to toss restlessly to and fro upon her bed. Michael bade her be quiet, and, passing his arm round her, took her head on to his shoulder, as he had often done before. She fell asleep again

and slept quietly for a long time—so long that Michael began to suffer from his difficult position, but he would not move.

Presently she stirred slightly, and he saw that her eyes were open and fixed upon her hand. On her finger was the plain gold ring that Michael had found, after long searching among the nettles, and slipped into its place the day before.

The hand itself was whiter and finer for her illness, and round her wrist was the handsome lace cuff of a garment she had never worn before. Sheila had come to herself and was evidently puzzled; Michael held his breath as she put out one weak finger and touched the familiar patchwork of the quilt and then examined the lace of her sleeve by the dim light of the candle.

Next she fell to wondering at the broad hand and wrist that closed her about, and to twisting the black seal-ring round and round on Michael's finger, settling herself on his arm the while, as a sick child does.

Michael could contain himself no longer, but, tremulous with joy, bent down and kissed, very lightly, the tossed curls of her hair. He repented the moment after, for she started nervously and then slowly turned till she could see at least a part of his face. Memory was coming back to her, and she moved uneasily, trying to be free.

Michael laid her down gently, and, mindful of Mrs. Faa's instructions, got some good broth that stood warm by the fire and fed her spoonful by

spoonful. She took it obediently, but presently turned her head from him to the wall and began to cry weakly to herself.

Michael's heart sank, and "Will I stay beside you, Sheila?" he asked.

"No," she murmured.

"Will I get Theresa for you?"

"Thank you kindly," she said, but still she went on crying.

"I will go for her, then," he said sadly. "God comfort you, Sheila, and try not be crying." And he went out into the cold empty night that was not half so cold and empty as his life.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE HAMLET OF KILLEEN

FROM that day, Michael went no more into Sheila's cottage. She lay long weak and ill upon her bed, never complaining, but often weeping to herself when no one was by.

What her thoughts were no one knew, for she discovered them to no one. Sometimes, Mrs. Faa told Michael, she would take off her ring and put it away under the pillow, but always, when the evening came, she would have it on again.

Michael's life at this time was one of unending labour. He rose before the sun and watched every man at his work, and saw that all was exactly, if leisurely, done. He visited the distant corners of his property, and from morning till night was liable to be interrupted by his people bringing him complaints or disputes. All his evenings, sometimes far into the night, were spent in the hall, studying and reading, sometimes alone, sometimes with the schoolmaster from Gurt, but more often with Father O'Brien, who spared neither time nor pains in his pupil's service.

Already he had caused crooked Sam Muldoon,

the attorney, to draw up a deed of conveyance by which the Swanlabar fields, about which there had been always a dispute, was finally restored to Killaraa. By a heavy mortgage upon it he had raised sufficient ready money to pay off Hawks's debts, so that the old couple might sit quiet in their own house till their time came.

But always, as Michael rode or walked, spoke or was reading, there was a secret sense within him that was twice alive. In his heart was set the picture of Sheila, as the silver image of a saint is set in its shrine; and his memory was blackened and his peace destroyed by another picture—a black-bearded head that haunted him with the grimace of a violent death.

Day after day went by and his trouble was in no way lightened. Night after night he had eaten the bread of tears, and with the morning had risen as hopeless as ever.

Under this oppression, there had grown up in his mind the idea of making a journey to the Holy Well of St. Bridget at Kiltubride, some forty miles away. It was in no spirit of superstition that he resolved upon it. He had heard of it in his childhood as a holy place: if he could have heard of a holier, it is there he would have gone. If he could have climbed up into heaven itself and laid his unhappy case down at the merciful feet of the Almighty for judgment, it is what he would have done.

He hid his resolve from every one, even from

Father O'Brien; for, though Michael designed to remain in the church that had nurtured him, there was a corner of his mind that he kept to himself.

The only companion he thought of was Mick-a-Dandy, about whom he felt a great anxiety. There were strange reports of him going about the country. God knows, the people said, he had always been clean and to spare, but now you never got a sight of him but he was rinsin' himself and his old clothes in the cold water.

He never came up to the house of Tallat now, but often lurked down by the river, flying with great swiftness if he saw anyone approaching. Michael's anger at him for having been the means of driving Sheila from Tallat had long ago given place to the feeling that he himself was responsible for Mick-a-Dandy's present state.

Therefore, one cold afternoon about the middle of November, Michael put some bread and meat in his pocket, and went across the fields in the direction of the bog, where the old shepherd had that morning seen him lying asleep under a rick of turf.

Near the borders of the bog was a narrow byroad that led to the little hamlet of Killeen, a tiny place made up of a ruined chapel, that was little more than a heap of stones, and about half a score of cabins. As Michael neared the road, he heard a great commotion in the distance, the barking of dogs, and women's voices loudly raised.

The place was on his own land; so he quickened

his steps, and went forward to see what was the matter.

He was soon near enough to make out Mick-a-Dandy, standing in the midst of a group of women and children. His red coat was torn, his hair was long and wild, and he was cursing horribly in a loud whining voice. It was the first time Michael had heard a bad word from his mouth.

The band of children were dancing, hooting and jeering, and the half-dozen wild-looking women were shrieking at them.

There was a sudden lull as Michael came up; the women curtsied, Mick-a-Dandy became silent, and the children drew together. One boy stood out as the leader of the band—a handsome bold-looking child of ten or eleven years, with brown legs, a short plaid petticoat, and a boy's jacket.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Murphy?" said Michael to one of the women.

She was a fine tall person, with a quantity of black hair.

"Save ye, Master Michael," she answered, turning her flashing black eyes and threatening fist on the boy, "it's that young limb, divil own him; the children's took agin Mick-a-Dandy, God knows why, and Daniel, here, is settin' them on to cast stones, sorrow mend him, at the poor innocent, that should go as easy through the world as the sup of milk down the child's throat. Ah, ye young divil, wait till your dada comes home! But he doesn't care a throinyeen for his dada," she said

proudly to Michael, "and it isn't often I can get a hoult of him, or I'd lether the ould peddiget off his back."

"Come here to me, Daniel," said Michael to the boy. Instantly a beautiful golden-haired little girl, about four years old, darted to the boy's side, and, taking him by the hand, led him up to Michael.

"There, now!" said the women, smiling at each other, "did ever ye see the like of that? Lord love her little heart, child o' grace!"

"Why did you go to throw stones at Mick-a-Dandy?" asked Michael.

"I dunno," said the bold boy, grinning.

"They were all for Mick-a-Dandy a while back," cried another of the women. "When he'd be comin' in the town, there he'd sit in the sun, cobblin' his ould coat, for he won't let a woman in the place put a finger to it; there they'd be runnin' round him as thick as bees, and he in the middle of them, all as well as one of themselves."

"Come, now," said Michael sternly. "Tell out the reason, Daniel."

The boy hung his head. "We was playin' chanies in the ditch," he said, "and Mick-a-Dandy was comin' along, and all of a sudden he let a yell and fell to whirrling his arms up above his head like, and talkin' loud out to himself; and little Mary, here, scarred at him, and begorra I thought we'd put him out. And so we would, ony them ones began their screeching." And he nodded his head contemptuously towards the women.

"Hearken to him!" cried the women, "the young limb!"

"You have your manners to learn, boy," said Michael. "Don't you let me catch you throwing a stone again at Mick-a-Dandy, or it'll be the worse for you." Then he stooped and kissed the little Mary who had been gazing at him all the while, and put a shilling into her hand, for the love of Sheila and because her eyes were grey.

After saying good night to the women he took hold of Mick-a-Dandy and led him away.

The poor man was trembling, and Michael felt a great distress for him.

"Come along, my poor fellow," he said, "I want a word with you." Mick-a-Dandy twisted his head this way and that, and seemed ready to run; but Michael marched him along, back the way he had come.

"Are you hungry, Mick-a-Dandy?" he asked.

"Troth, Master Michael," he whimpered, "it's as empty as a fiddle I am."

"Well, wait now till we get out of the wind down in the little hollow beyond; for I've got some food here in my pocket for you."

He seemed greatly troubled as Michael pulled him along, murmuring to himself, "Oh, Wirrashtrue! Mary, have pity! The little childhre! the little childhre!"

Once in the hollow, and sheltered by the bushes, Michael found a mossy place for them to sit, and then gave the bread and meat he had brought to

Mick-a-Dandy. He took it eagerly and, moving some paces off, ate it rapidly, like a starved man, with his back turned to Michael. But over the last morsels he began to hesitate, and at last threw them to his dog.

"Indeed and I begrudge it to him," he said, turning again to Michael, "but the poor fellow is as famished as meself, and he's very sinsible of kindness, and it'd go to his heart if I was to forget him. And, whisper!" he said, talking mysteriously behind his hand, "he isn't right in his head this month and more, the creature!"

"Sit down, sit down, Mick-a-Dandy," said Michael. "The leaves are dry, and we're out of the wind, and there's no one can hear us. What's the reason you haven't been near us at Tallat this while back, Mick-a-Dandy? I'm afraid your mind is troubled. You did no harm on the night we know of, only kindness, and ye have no call to be distressed."

"I'm soft, yer honour, I'm soft," said Mick-a-Dandy, sighing heavily, and rustling the dead leaves with one bare foot. There was silence between them for a moment; then he suddenly turned and looked his companion anxiously in the face:

"Will ye have the kindness to tell me now, Master Michael, what was I sayin' beyant at Killeen? Maybe there was some words in me mouth I hadn't had a ought to have said; and I'll be grateful to ye to tell me if ye took notice of anything."

Michael looked kindly back at him, and "Not a word did I hear, Mick-a-Dandy," he said, "excepting only 'Mary, have pity,' and 'tare an' ages,' and 'my sorrow,' and the like of that: all that a Christian man may say."

"D'ye tell me that?" said Mick-a-Dandy, his face brightening. "Well, then, now, I could have sworn me own voice was in me ears, sayin' all manner of unchancy words. And sure I wouldn't, Master Michael, not for worlds. And," he went on sorrowfully, the water standing in his eyes, "the little childhre, God love them, they had no harm in it, for they must be havin' their bit of play. Sure, ye'll see them runnin' the very same way after a little drownded cat. The little childhre is like the good people, Master Michael, tindher and beautiful, . . . and playin' and laughin' day and night. But once ye get on the wicked side of them, they'll let ye know it right enough. . . . But sure I never thought they'd turn again poor Mick-a-Dandy. But *they know*, Master Michael, *they know*. . . . I wisht I was out of it, Michael dear, if it was God's good will. The trouble in me head is very sore. . . . If I could find me grave annywhere open for me, I'd lie down in it, and welcome."

"Come, come, Mick-a-Dandy!" said Michael. "Never let your heart down like that, boy." Then dropping his voice to a whisper, he said, "I've been and told all to the Magistrate, and—would you fancy now?—he says it was a good job."

"Troth and it was so, yer honour," said Mick-

a Dandy briskly. "The dirty black scoundrel to go interfering with the like of Sheila McBride!"

"But, Mick-a-Dandy," went on Michael, striving to speak for the other's comprehension, "for all the magistrate said, I have the sense of sin borne in upon me. My mind is blackened, Mick-a-Dandy: I have no heart or pleasure in anything, and it is to the Holy Well at Kiltubride I am goin' at dawn in the morning to see if I can come any nigher to the mercy of God. And if you, a Christian man, will take the same road with me, to see if you can get any ease for the trouble in your head, I will be glad of your company."

"Thank yer honour! thank yer honour!" said Mick-a-Dandy. "Indeed and I'll go every step of the way with ye, if so be as I can go straight enough for ye: for it's a queer thing with me, it's to the right or the left I must always be goin'. The straight road is mere punishment to me, but maybe with your company beside me and the blessed holy water drawing on before, I'll make shift to get there this time."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE ROSCAUL HUNT

It was very cold next morning at four o'clock when Michael got up and lit his lantern. He put on his old working clothes and let himself noiselessly out by the back door, so as not to disturb the sleeping house.

He unlocked the yard gate and went round to the haggart to look for Mick-a-Dandy, who had promised him to sleep that night on the warm side of the hayrick, that he might be ready for the morning.

Michael called and hunted up and down, but no Mick-a-Dandy was to be found; so he started away by himself, across the fields skirting the bog, till he struck a road that led by the northeastward to Kiltubride. He still carried his lantern in one hand and a stout ash stick in the other, for the sky overhead was heavily clouded and he could not see where he should put down his foot.

The world was very still about him: all living creatures were in deep sleep, that was made more heavy by the masses of cloud that pressed down from above upon the earth. But as Michael turned

from the bog, he heard in the darkness behind him the sound of swiftly running bare feet. He stopped and held up his lantern, and its light fell on the red coat and bearded face of Mick-a-Dandy.

"Good morning to you, Mick-a-Dandy."

"Save you kindly, Master Michael. Here I am at the last, after followin' your light all the way from Tallat. Dancin' up and down I saw it like a little travellin' star. The sleep went from me there at Tallat, yer honour, so I just went dandherin' up the hill to see how old Theresa was. We're great acquaintances, old Theresa and me. An' I carried a creel of Sheila McBride's turf up to Theresa's cottage for her. She's often borrowin' things that way now; it's mighty handy for her, I tell her. And Miss Sheila's doin' grand, sir. I was lookin' through the window at her sittin' by the fire, and very contented I was till old Theresa came out and sent me back with the turf."

Michael held his breath at the mention of Sheila's name; but Mick-a-Dandy said nothing more, walking along with a rapid step, glancing from side to side and over his shoulder with something of the manner of a nervous shying horse.

Michael gave him the food he had brought, and Mick-a-Dandy first set his teeth in it, then hesitated and said,

"And where's yer honour's breakfast?"

"I am going fasting to Kiltubride," he answered.

"Then divil be in the bit I eat!" said he and

spat out the mouthful, throwing the rest behind him for his dog.

"You'd better have eaten it," said Michael. "It's a bitter cold morning, and you're through with that old coat, me boy. You don't want windows in your clothes this weather. I'll get you a new coat for the winter, Mick-a-Dandy, and a handsome one too."

"Thank yer honour; but this old coat is sweeter to me than any other. I don't find the cold in it; and moreover," he said, glancing about in the darkness and speaking in a whisper, "there's no tellin' what's sewn in the linin' of it. Feel of it and see the weight." And he held up a corner of it to Michael, who found it stiff and as heavy as lead. "Whisht, now, and I'll tell ye. There's a grand funeral for Mick-a-Dandy in the left skirt of it, and a thrifle for charity sewn in the back, and all that's in the right skirt of it is for Miss Sheila with Mick-a-Dandy's kind love."

"Tut, my boy," said Michael. "You've no need to talk like a dying man. You're in your health, and you'll see days and to spare."

Michael could not see his face, but his voice sounded melancholy in the darkness: "I'm goin' soon, sir. I can't tell how, but I'm goin' soon." Then he started violently at a large white stone by the side of the road. "Mother of Jesus! what's that?" And he shied up against Michael, who felt the violent trembling of his body.

"'Tis nothing but a stone, Mick-a-Dandy. See

here, now, we're bound on a good journey, and you've no reason to be afraid of anything."

"Ah, Michael," said he, recovering himself, but speaking in a whisper, "talk is easy. It isn't you that's knowing what I know. *Them* and me was always friends till now, and that's how I lived happy. But now they're after me, so they are, and as soon as ever the sun is down there I'm dodgin' them from place to place. The *sign* was on me coat, Master Michael, and that's the way they made it out, and they're mad at me comin' into their places with *that* upon me. And there's the golden guineas old Gunyon is after givin' me. They're wild to get them. For as much as they hate the one thing, they love the other, ay, and they're that cunnin', every one of them knows what's in the tail of me coat, and all night they're after it. And troth it's wore out I am with runnin' from them."

As they marched along together the dawn broke, cold and sullen. The grey light shewed the sunken pallor of Mick-a-Dandy's face and the lean gauntness of his frame. Michael's heart was much cast down. Like a stone cast out of the hand, he thought, his deed had gone out among men, and here was one of those whom it had struck. Mick-a-Dandy's offended innocence would be laid to his account.

Mile by mile they went swiftly along together. Every now and then Mick-a-Dandy would start away, spring over the low ditch, and be out of sight

in a moment; presently he would reappear, and without a word take his place again, falling easily into Michael's stride.

The day became more intemperate and the cold north wind blew upon them sharply. Michael liked it little enough and wondered to see his companion so warm in his raggedness. By degrees the world about them had woke up; the first person they had passed on the road was an old farmer riding a brood mare, who saluted them in a friendly way. Directly he had gone by, Mick-a-Dandy cast back, and soon Michael heard him begging in a loud whine.

"Now why should you do that?" he asked, as Mick-a-Dandy came up. "Amn't I here to give you all the money you want? There's no need for you to be begging."

Mick-a-Dandy looked at him slyly.

"It's a habit I've got," says he. "I never could pass a good coat on the road, but I must thry the heart inside of it. Sure that was ould Deelahan, him that sent his wife home to her people because he said she was atin' too much on him. It would be a deed of mercy to get a brass farthin' out of Deelahan in charity. But sorra a sowl is poor enough to please him, and the divil'll have the pickin' of his pockets in hell." Then all at once he burst out into a yell: "Hoi whoo-oop!" he called.

They were now on a rising ground, and from far away below came the confused noise of shouting

and yelping cries of the hounds; in the distance, scattered over some open country, studded with groves, they could see a moving patch of red, and the hounds like leaping specks of grey.

Mick-a-Dandy was beside himself with excitement. He danced and shouted and waved his old hat in the air.

"Whoop, hullo, yoicks!" he cried. "'Tis the Roscaul hunt is out! Hurray! I'm after them! There's a grand hunt dinner to-night at Gurt. Ay, there'll be doin's. I'm off, agra! I never could see a hunt go without folleyin' on. The holy well'll keep sweet to all etarnity, and if it's the will of God I'll go another day. Hoi, hurray!"

And waving his old hat in one hand and his stick in the other, he leaped and tore across the country with the speed of a galloping horse, his red hair and coat-tails flying out on the wind, and his cur well up behind.

CHAPTER XXXV

PILGRIMAGE

MICHAEL laughed to see Mick-a-Dandy go, and as the exciting sounds of the hounds' crying came up to him, he could have shouted and run as well.

But soon his sober sense came back to him, and he turned away to take up his journey alone. He felt a kind of relief that Mick-a-Dandy was gone, for he was like a child, full of waywardness and wandering thoughts, and so long as he was near, Michael could have no settled mind.

He had gone about thirteen miles, and still had twenty-seven to go. He had determined to do the whole journey without food or rest, hoping, as many another had done before him, to find comfort for his troubled spirit in the punishment of his body.

His further way led through a wide lonely moor, high and bleak, forming a tableland that lay between the hilly region about Tallat and the mild inland scenery of Kiltubride. Michael's heart was cold within him as he entered upon the bleak desolate moor across which wound for miles the

neglected road that was hardly more than a track. With strange whirring sounds the north wind shook the dry heather. It whipped the coarse tufts of grass, and smote sharply on Michael's cheek.

"A mad errand I am come upon," he said to himself. "Did ever a man before come out to look for the pardon of God in such a wilderness?" And even as he thought it, he answered himself: "Ay, and thousands upon thousands, and some of them travelling this very road."

Once he stood in the road to listen: there was no sign or sound of any living creature. Both beast and bird had read the signal of snow in the wind and the packed sky, and had fled to their holes or to the warmer plains.

Michael took up his march: it was a fit place for him, he thought. Of all men that he knew he was the most lonely, and here was the loneliest place. His trouble weighed upon him; almost he could have found it in his heart to have joined his crying to the wind's. Soiled hands and garments, he thought, may be made clean again, but there is no washing that will right the past.

Once more he stood still: he was only making a fool of himself; where was the use? He would go back to Tallat.

As he stood there looking this way and that, irresolute and brooding in his despair, suddenly, secretly, and mysteriously the finger of God was laid upon his spirit, and all was changed.

He had gone out to look for forgiveness, and it had come to meet him half-way.

What had happened, or how, he could not tell, but his knees trembled beneath him, tears poured from his eyes, and with his lips he repeated again and again words which came to him, he could not tell from where: "I believe in the Holy Ghost, Lord and Giver of life."

It was the same wild scene about him, but how changed in a moment! The voice of the wind in his ears was a great chant from the unknown, hymning the unknown in obedience to law.

The smell of clouds and of the ocean was in his nostrils; the earth under his feet seemed turning in its path to the honour of God.

"A secret," he said aloud, "a secret between the Eternal and me." Then, hardly knowing what he did, he sought about upon the road for stones, and built up a little heap on the place where his feet had stood, that he might remember the place where consolation had come to him, and the vow that his soul had made.

For a while he stood looking round him, and then once more set his face towards Kiltubride.

As he went, large snowflakes came out of the north, flying like birds, level on the storming wind. One great one flew straight towards him, as he went, and lit upon his breast like a tiny dove. This first day of winter seemed to him more wonderful than any spring. His heart was so uplifted within him that he almost ran. Miles of the road soon lay

behind him. As he went, he felt neither hunger, nor weariness, nor cold; nothing but joy. It was as though he were travelling with wings at his feet, an angel holding his either hand.

About five miles out of Kiltubride he came to a cross-roads. A woman was standing there in bare feet, one side of her plaid shawl and black skirt entirely white with snow.

As soon as Michael came up, she asked him the way to Kiltubride.

"Is it to the well you are going?" asked Michael.

"Ay, is it," she answered.

"Then we can go in company," said Michael, "for it is there I am going too."

The woman turned without a word and went along at his side. She was tall and gaunt and hard-featured, and her stride was like a man's. Though the wind whipped her garments and flung them this way and that, and though she was carrying some burden under her shawl, she made as good a pace as Michael himself.

Every now and then his eyes were drawn to her; she was walking with her chin thrust forth, and a look as though she were driven by the hand of fate.

Presently, "And is that a child you are carrying?" he asked.

"Yes," said the woman: "a sick child."

"It is very poor weather for the sick," said Michael, "or for anybody for that matter."

"It is as God sends it," said she.

A little way further he tried again. "Will I carry the child for you?" he asked.

The woman laughed.

"Is it a man carry a sick child in the snow?" she said: "no indeed."

Presently she looked up at him, and "You're no common man," she said.

Michael made no reply. She looked at him curiously. "And it is to the Well you are going? They say St. Bridget makes wonderful cures there, and that there's hundreds go there every week in the summer and come back relieved."

"So I've heard them say," said Michael. "But what is the sickness that is on your child?"

"Ah, that would be the tellin'!" said she; then looking again at his face, she drew closer to his side and spoke in a low tone. "In the night and in my dreams I know it right enough what it is," she said. "Six children I have had, and this is the last of them. I have seen five to go, and now this one is sick. And I'll tell you how they're goin'. At night and in my dream I see a white lady that comes to me, and smiles wicked-like in my face; and I'm thinkin' it is a barren woman that lived in the old house before me and that takes my children for jealousy. I've begged and prayed Himself upon my knees to take me out of that house, for there is a curse on it. But sure he can see nothin' but his glass. Ay, when they lie across my knees one after the other, his

tears out of his eyes are no better than whiskey and water. Look here and see," she said, suddenly stopping. "Look now at the little child, and tell me what will I do to keep it." She turned her back to the wind and opened a corner of her shawl, and Michael looked and saw a child of between two and three years curled round in her arms and sleeping warm. There was a flush on the little cheek, and its golden curls were spread over the mother's dress. Michael marvelled how so beautiful a blossom could come from so harsh a stem.

"Well indeed," said he, "and what do you want? I never saw a child looking better."

"Ay," she said, "isn't it pretty? And so wise; an' talks to me so sweet. But I saw the white lady two nights gone, and the child's none so well since. I declare to God," she said, her spare bosom heaving, "if this one is taken, I'll make an end of meself, and may God pardon me the black sin, for my trouble is past bearing."

The child began to stir, and she moved on again, her head bowed and her face hidden in the shawl.

"Is it of keeping her in the house you're afraid?" asked Michael.

"It is so," she answered in a smothered voice. "Where five have perished, how can the sixth live and do well? The blight is on her already."

"I've heard," said Michael, "there are doctors in Dublin who are wonderful clever in saving the sick."

"Ay," said the woman and laughed a short

laugh. "And so is Christ, wonderful merciful up in his heaven, but I have no way to get there."

They walked quickly on in silence for a time, and then Michael spoke.

"Listen to me now, for I have something to say to you. I am a man under a vow, and my vow is to save life wherever it lies in my power, were it only the life of a worm on the road; for it all comes in the one way. I can give you the means to carry the child where you will; and it is not from my hand you will be taking the money, but straight from the hand of God."

The woman looked up at him with amazement. Michael looked kindly back at her. Again she dropped her head, and her face was covered in her shawl.

Kiltubride, which means the church of the well of Bridget, was now in sight. The village straggled in a hollow, and the ruins of the old church stood up on a little hill. The snow had made a greyness over everything that was soon to be a winter whiteness.

In the wintry wind the little village street was very bleak as the two travellers went up towards the hill, in the dusk of the afternoon.

Not a soul was stirring; the house-doors were shut, and it seemed as though the place was deserted. But when they began to climb the hill, they heard a tapping coming along behind them, and there was a ragged fellow hopping towards

them on crutches, who bade them good evening, and said,

"It is a wild night for you to be coming to the well. It is in the summer you should be coming, when we have the music and the banners and the people in their good clothes all goin' round in the sun. Father Gollard will not be here now till the summer again; but if it is agreeable to you, I can teach you the stations as well as the priest himself. Man and boy, I have sat by the well this forty years to wait for a new leg. And maybe you can spare a trifle for my trouble and for the honour of God."

The cripple had a strange face, high-nosed and thin-lipped; he was new-shaved, and his head would have appeared handsomely over a bishop's vestment.

As soon as Michael consented, he led them up to the old ruins, where nothing but two windowed walls still stood, and an ancient hoary cross, with a round head and a carven shaft.

The tramped track shewed where the pilgrims' feet had been, and along it in the snow and wind they followed the crippled beggar.

Seven times round they had to go, the way of the sun, kneeling at the cross and the well and before the ruined altar, round which the wind went crying.

The woman prayed loud and fervently, and the tears rolled down her face. Michael followed her, kneeling silently like one in a dream. It was far

off on the moor that his blessing had found him, and now he was content.

That night they took refuge from the hard weather in the inn; for Michael, on finding that his companion intended to walk back twenty miles in the snow, paid for a room for her and the child.

While he broke his fast in the inn kitchen, she sat and watched him steadfastly, wondering that he should eat, for she had thought him a messenger from heaven. . .

His meal ended, he was overcome with weariness, and on the poor bed in the inn-chamber he enjoyed the deepest and the sweetest rest that he had ever known.

The last sound he heard was the gay talk and the running feet of the little child overhead; for, having slept through the cold of the afternoon, it was ready to talk and play with its mother through the night.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE HUNT DINNER

THAT night in Gurt, John Macaulay's Supper Room was lit by no less than five-and-forty candles, and decorated with holly and pine. It was a large room, built off the Blue Soldier Hotel, and used for public occasions.

The hotel-keeper, Patrick Kavanagh, was a little round bald-headed man; he was so kind-hearted that he could refuse a glass of whiskey to nobody, and of so tender a conscience that he was continually regretting the consequences.

He had put out his best to-night, and he was smiling cheerfully and rubbing his hands as he looked round the edge of the door at the hilarious company within.

It was a handsome scene, for nearly all the men were in pink; most of them were young, and very fine fellows in very fine spirits.

Dinner was over, and the table was covered with a multitude of glasses, decanters, and wine-bottles. The guest of the evening was a young officer from a Highland regiment, Sir Decies Maulevrier. He was a magnificent young man, six foot two, stal-

wart, and well becoming his full Highland costume.

The merry-making was at its height. Sir Rawleigh Monsell's eldest son, a delicate refined-looking youth, was standing on a chair with arms akimbo, singing "Rock me to sleep, mother," in a high falsetto with all the drawing-room graces of the day.

His last flourish was greeted with a roar of cheering, and his place on the chair was instantly taken by a stout man with an immense bass voice, who started the hunting-song of "Modediderooo":

"'Good morrow,' said the fox, 'Good morrow to you, sir,
And what is that you're atin'?'
''Tis a fine fat goose I've stolen from you,
And won't you come and taste him?'

"*Chorus.* Modediderooo-eroo-eranee,
Modediderooo, Modediderooo.
'Good morrow,' said the fox in the morning.

'The fox he faced a six-foot wall,
When the men were afraid to follow.
As high as you ride and as great as your pride,
'Tis you will be low on the morrow.

"*Chorus.* Modediderooo," etc.

The shout of the chorus completely drowned the buzzing noise which came from one of the young Butlers who sat at the far end of the table and for whom the excitements of the evening had proved too much. His arms were stretched over the table, one embracing a bottle and the other a glass, and from his lips came a droning ballad which seemed to have neither beginning nor end:

**"The very next morning the engagement proved hot,
And brave old Admiral Benbow received a chain-shot."**

"Here!" shouted an older man from the head of the table, "some of you shut up that beggar. We can't listen to that all night."

Several attempts were made to disturb young Butler. One man held a lighted match under his nose, another tipped his chair up, while a third tried to take his bottle from him. All these attempts young Butler resented with the utmost fury, and at last they let him alone. During the rest of the evening he remained in the same case, falling to at his ballad at unexpected intervals.

Meanwhile the attraction of the moment was a quiet and precise-looking man who was solemnly eating a wine-glass for a bet. His backer hovered uneasily behind him. "Shut up, you fellows," he kept saying. "It gives him indigestion if he's disturbed at his meal."

"Maulevrier says he wants to hear Mick-a-Dandy crow," said Mylotte. "Where's Kavanagh? Send out a messenger to look for Mick-a-Dandy, Kavanagh."

"Yes, sir; certainly, sir; on the minute, sir," said Kavanagh, smiling and bowing and rubbing his hands, and then making his way as well as he could through the admiring crowd of waiters and ostlers and their acquaintances who had gathered in the passage.

As soon as he had despatched a couple of messengers through the town to look for Mick-a-

Dandy, he returned again leading the two blind fiddlers, who had left their companion sitting in the inn kitchen.

The two blind men were taken to their places against the wall, and then, after bowing to the noisy company, they began to tune their fiddles. At the sound there was a sudden hush, and then a shout was raised for Maulevrier and the Highland fling. The fiddles struck up a fine reel and Maulevrier came out, laughing and snapping his fingers, into the middle of the floor. Some men at the end called out "Get on the table, Maulevrier, we can't see you there!" and in one bound the great fellow was up, kicking decanters and glasses right and left, which every now and then fell smashing on to the floor, as he danced through the steps of the reel.

The crowd outside increased by degrees: in the yard grew a row of lime-trees, and upon them clustered men and boys till a hundred gleaming eyes were turned upon the room within. These raised a cheer when the dance came to an end: and excited as he was by the applause and shouting, Maulevrier was easily persuaded to give the sword dance. A couple of swords were promptly laid crosswise on the table and the few bottles and glasses that stood in their places leaped and jingled as the table quivered under the blows of his feet.

Mick-a-Dandy arrived in the middle of it, and was loudest of all in his applause; he loved any-

thing like a handsome scene, and danced and whooped in his excitement.

When the young officer came down from the table he was surprised to have his hand grasped by a wild-looking man with bright red hair and a coat that, stained and torn, was like a parody of the other hunting coats about him.

"Thank yer honour! thank yer honour! Troth, it's done me heart good to see ye! Young and beautiful and yer legs as straight as a fir-tree and as lish as a greyhound's. Ah, 'tis a fine man ye are, and may the Lord keep ye, and bring ye to a straight old age!" And in his delight he stooped and kissed the young man's hand.

"Hullo!" said he, good humouredly enough, but drawing away from him. "You're Mick-a-Dandy, ain't you? They tell me you can do a cock very well. Let's hear you now."

Mick-a-Dandy turned away and strutted up and down. He flapped his elbows and scraped upon the floor and chuckled as though calling to his flock of hens, and then at last stretched out his neck to an amazing length and delivered a great crow, as loud as if it had come from a trumpet of brass.

His performance suited well the temper of his audience, which was fast becoming more and more boisterous. Three times Mick-a-Dandy crowed.

Young Butler was still sitting in his place. His head was now adorned with a high hat of newspaper, and every now and then he could be heard

drawling out his ballad in the intervals of the crowing:

**"And as he lay there, dying, to his merry men he did say,
'Take me up in your arms, boys, and carry me away.'"**

"Hullo, Mick-a-Dandy!" called Mylotte, nodding and winking to the men about him, "that's a very bad coat you've got on; let the fiddler there have it, and I'll give ye the money to buy a new one!" Then to those about him he said in a loud whisper, "Watch him now, he's got no end of money sewed up in the tail of it."

Mick-a-Dandy clutched his old coat nervously about him and looked angrily at Mylotte.

"Ah, yer honour," he said, "why would ye be irritatin' me by speakin' ill of the ould coat? It's an honourable coat. Sure it was gev to me by yer honour's father in charity, for it was that tatthered in the back, on the day he was thrown at the six-barred gate at Lisadyne, that he was ashamed to be seen in it. And sure yer honour's makin' a fool of me about the money: yer honour knows very well ye're owin' me sixpence ever since the day ye ate the fresh herrin' and the three pitates off me in the bog. But I wouldn't be troublin' yer honour for the sixpence, for I know ye'll never find the heart to pay it."

There was a yell of laughter, for every soul in the country knew the story of Mick-a-Dandy's herring, and Mylotte was no favourite. Encour-

aged by his success, Mick-a-Dandy went on with a sudden humility of manner: "And as for the money for the coat, yer honour, ah, where would ye get it but off that poor girl Nora O'Hea, that never had the sense: and sorrow be my supper if ever I touch a penny belongin' to her, for it's all she has to thank God for at this moment."

It was the custom of the country to allow Mick-a-Dandy to say whatever he liked, and the person who felt the lash of his tongue was expected to show no resentment; but it was a very ugly grin that Mylotte regarded him with.

Thinking matters were going a little too far, Maulevrier cut in.

"Have a glass of whiskey, Mick-a-Dandy, my good fellow?"

"No, and thank yer honour kindly," said he. "I never do be touchin' it. Me head's too weak for the drink."

"He'd make a very nice fool if he was drunk," said one of the Butlers. "Here, Mick-a-Dandy, come on, now; take a glass of whiskey for once. It's only a fool would refuse it, God knows."

"Thank ye kindly, yer honour," said Mick-a-Dandy, drawing back; "I never do be touchin' it. The fool's way is the best way for me."

"Oh, nonsense, now! Come on, boy!"

"No, thank yer honour kindly," and Mick-a-Dandy would have drawn right back, but those behind hustled him forward.

He still kept his good-nature, but began to look

anxiously about. Nothing but flushed faces and eyes full of laughter met his glance.

"Here, you fellows!" called out the young officer who had been with Hawks in the fair, "come on, we're going to make Mick-a-Dandy glorious. Now, boy, here's a glass of whiskey."

"Ah, sure yer honours are only jokin', I can see that!" said he, keeping up a rueful smile, and trying to wriggle his way through the crowd that hemmed him in.

"Keep the door, there!" shouted one of the young men. "Don't let Mick-a-Dandy out!"

There were cries of laughter as two men seized hold of him, and tried to pour the whiskey down his throat.

But Mick-a-Dandy was a powerful man, and, still keeping his rueful good-nature, he resisted his tormentors, and struck away the glass till it fell with a smash on to the floor.

The spirit of the young men was roused by opposition from a beggar like Mick-a-Dandy.

"Damn the beast," said one of them, "he shall have it whether he likes it or not."

Up to this his tormentors had been good-natured, but now a spirit of mocking cruelty seemed to leap up, and run in a flash through the room, setting alight face after face, till almost every one had the same expression.

Mick-a-Dandy felt the change, and began to grow frightened; he looked wildly about. "Ah, your honours! your worships!" he cried; "would

ye go for to hurt a poor omadhaun that never harmed a fly? For the love of God, sirs, let me out!" and he struggled so hard that it took four of the strongest men there to force him down into a chair.

They were laughing and heated with exertion when they got him down. Mick-a-Dandy, who was now panting and yelling inarticulately in his terror, searched face after face with a lightning rapidity, looking for a gleam of sympathy and finding not one.

There was a spirit of laughter everywhere: the faces at the windows were laughing; the eyes that looked from the trees appeared to be laughing too.

He burst into tears and sobbing. "Pity, pity, gentlemen!" he said, but they only laughed the more.

One of them got a burnt cork and made great black circles round his eyes, and another man with some grease-paint made red patches on his cheeks. When this was done he looked so wild an object that he was scarcely human; and they laughed and laughed again; and the more they laughed, the greater grew the terror in his frantic eyes.

The red fox that had run that day before these very hunters could have felt no greater fear.

"Mr. Kavanagh! Mr. Kavanagh! will ye stand by and see me murdered?" he shrieked; and then they tilted back his chair and gagged him with a couple of corks. Peter Mylotte brought up a full bottle of brandy, and the crowd of red-coated men

pressed round Mick-a-Dandy's chair, roaring with laughter.

Mr. Kavanagh, the inn-keeper, was wringing his hands and running up and down by the door in terrible anxiety. To the common people there was something sacred in the person of Mick-a-Dandy, and the inn-keeper did not like his being meddled with under that roof; but who was he to interfere?

The waiters shared in his anxiety, and were saying loud out in the passage that it was a sin and a shame. But the blind fiddlers that stood by the wall were stricken as if with a palsy; they trembled and shook as they hearkened to the smothered sounds of agony from the chair.

The formidable laugh of cruelty spoke to their ears in prophecy: they were helpless and old, and already they knew what it was to be made the sport of the strong. At last stretching out their arms and feeling along the wall they crept moaning out of the room, and "For the love of God!" they cried to each person they touched as they went by.

When they were gone, a strange thing happened. In that room so full of noise a silence began to spread, and the centre of it was the centre of the group about the chair.

Loud tongues fell silent one by one, and faces that had been flushed with laughter began to take on another look: men grew pale before the silence as it spread around the room, like the eddy of a

wind that sweeps in a circle around a nodding field.

Soon even the faces that pressed about the windows gaped pale and aghast; the only sound that was heard in the room was a whispering, as men peered over each other's shoulders at the group about the chair.

Then it was that the noise of horses' feet began to be heard outside; one or two of the company would go up to the centre of the room and look for a moment, and then edge their way to the door in silence without a word to their fellows; once in the court-yard they would call for their horses and ride away home by themselves.

Outside the crowd grew as if by magic; men pressed ten deep against the windows and their murmurings grew louder and louder. They watched the town doctor come in, and kneel and busy himself for a while and then rise shaking his head. His face was pale, but he smiled as he spoke to the gentlemen around, for how can a man quarrel with his daily bread?

A moment after this, the gentlemen left the room all together, the last man trying to be first. Crowds were standing silent in the streets as they rode through the town, every gentleman among them sick in his heart.

And behind them they left the thing they had done for the people to see. And see they did; for they pressed in troops into the emptied room till there was no place to stand or breathe.

In the large inn-kitchen Patrick Kavanagh's big wife, transported with anger, whispered hoarsely with the women about her, and their talk was a thing to hear. The sight of the clown's paint on the awful face of the dead man had set them mad: there the laughter and the horror of the night's work were painted at once for all men to look upon.

There was no judgment then, nor for long enough after; for it is hard for the sheep to bring the shepherd to justice. But that night a bitter seed was sown, the fruit of which had to be reaped by the innocent unborn.

There is no telling the sorrow that went through the country, for Mick-a-Dandy had been better loved than many a wise man. Two days after was his burying, and then the train of his funeral stretched for miles and miles, and not a woman there but was crying.

And his memory flourished and was far livelier than that of another man. Long years after, those who had never seen him could tell you how he looked; and all the tales of his red coat and his crowings, of his kind heart and his stinging tongue, of his dog and his lost herring, and of his fleet running and his strange face.

For the fathers and mothers told the little children all the stories about him: but they never told the children how he died, till they were grown.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A SECOND WOOING

FROM the moment of Michael's return to Tallat his second wooing of Sheila began. Every day and every night he made his journey up the hill to the little cottage; he would watch from a distance to see when the door was shut, and then he would carry what he had brought to the little shed and put it down in the corner. Now it was a cake from the kitchen of Tallat, now a pheasant or a rabbit, now a basket of apples and a book on the top. To his great satisfaction these offerings were always taken into the cottage, and there was always, night and day, the warm glow of a fire on its hearth.

The weather was very severe: snow lay on the ground, making a cold splendour of the hills. The winds were high, continually roughening the surface of the snow and blowing the smoke of Sheila's cottage chimney this way and that.

At night Michael often wandered over the crests of the white hills. His mind, set free from the servitude that had crushed it, was growing in strength, and his spirit had come to its flowering time. In these lonely walks and meditations he

began to find a pleasure new and strange: many thoughts were born in his mind as mysteriously as the stars appear in a dark sky. He pondered on the past and the future, on the motions of his own soul and the strong forces of evil that waited to invade it; he thought much of his country and of the lot of those who tilled the soil that others called their own.

In the centre of his heart his love for Sheila was being slowly translated into a passion both sacred and intense. He was never so busy down at Tallat but he had a thought to set free that it might find its quick path up the hill to wander round Sheila's cabin and look in through the pane, or to enter and sit by the hearth with her. His mind was never so occupied but that the chamber in it that was kept for Sheila was full of her imagined comings and goings.

Soon it was not only his innermost fancy that was inhabited by her image, but the house of Tallat itself. As he sat in the hall, he would suddenly start from his books, thinking he heard the sound of her light feet crossing the floor behind him. More than once as he went down the long passages in the dusk, he caught sight of a white figure vanishing through an open doorway; then his heart would almost cease from its beating, so strong was its sudden hope that she herself was there at last.

But in his sober moments, when his imagination was quiet, he never thought that she would

come. For though since his journey to Kiltubride, he had felt a cleansing of the mind and had been relieved of the haunting visions that had troubled him, yet the past remained unaltered: the very house of Tallat itself seemed polluted, the air seemed less sweet, and the meadows themselves less fair, because of the secret lying hid down by the river.

In this way the month of December passed. Sheila was doing well, Theresa told him, but was weak from her fever and hardly even went out upon the path.

But as January came in Michael began to see her figure often standing in the door; sometimes she was even out upon the hill, and always looking over to Tallat.

He dared not trust himself to go to her, so violent an emotion seized him at the sight of her, and because of that fear he fell into the habit of playing a strange kind of hide-and-seek in order to leave his offerings unobserved.

Sometimes he would rise at midnight, and put on his working clothes, and taking a lantern, make his way up the hill, to attend to Sheila's rick of turf, and put fresh straw in the goat's shed. One night, when a light snow was falling, he went softly round to the cottage window and looked in. He seemed to see in the faint glow from the turf a white figure standing by the hearth, and the uncertain shadow of a face that looked darkly towards him.

He drew back suddenly, and went with an aching heart down the hill.

A few days later, it happened that after a cloudy morning, towards evening the sky cleared. The moon rose early, obediently mounting in the stillness along her ancient path. She was almost at the full, and of a white brilliance in a clear blue sky. It was very cold and the air was full of the myriad sharp arrows of the frost. Michael walked long that evening on the tops of the hills, and about nine o'clock came down behind Sheila's cottage; going softly round by the shed, he laid down in the corner a small furred hood of dark blue that Mrs. Faa had found among his mother's things.

Then with his hands clasped behind him and bent head he was on his way down to Tallat when a slight sound made him look up, and there was Sheila standing in the path. Above her hung the splendid moon, whose cold rays could but faintly kindle the crimson of her long mantle, but which illumined the whiteness of her young face.

The night was like one vast crystal; in the purity of its whiteness the earth seemed no more substantial than the heavens. For a moment they stood gazing, seeming to each other like strangers who had come from a far journey to a greeting.

Slowly Michael drew a step nearer to her; here at last was his darling and his heart's desire, and he might not take and kiss her because of the memories, terrible and sweet, that rose between them.

It was Sheila who spoke first.

"Michael," she said, "and may I speak to you? I have come out these many times to see you."

The notes of her voice rang like bells at the doors of Michael's ears. It was the same voice and yet not the same. The sound of past weeping was in it, and Michael drew yet a step nearer. He could hear the rapid breath sighing at her lips. Within her mantle her two white hands were clasped above her heart and Michael could see them tremble at its quivering strokes. His ring was on her finger.

He spoke at last.

"You are but poorly, Sheila," he said, "and not fit to be out with your feet in the snow. You must go back to the house."

"I cannot be unthankful any longer, Michael," she said. "You are giving me too much and every day. It is a beggar you will be, while Theresa lives like a queen."

"All there is at Tallat is yours, Sheila," said Michael gravely.

"And you were very kind to me when I was ill, Michael," she said faintly, "and I am thanking you very much."

"It was nothing, Sheila; nothing at all," said Michael.

"And I am thinking night and day," went on Sheila, her voice breaking, "of what Father O'Brien said to me. And maybe he was right. I was vain and foolish, Michael, and so I brought

trouble on you, and now all is over and gone and we can never be happy any more."

Michael did not speak.

"And now I will say good-bye, Michael," said she with the tears streaming down her face, "for I am going away to Kilgobnet."

Michael felt a pang of dismay: at last he said,

"Maybe you had better not, Sheila. If your uncle is a hard man, he might be talking to you the same as Father O'Brien. And if you will stay, I will ask nothing of you, Sheila; nor go so often to the shed, if you do not wish."

Sheila looked earnestly up at him. To her eyes his face was changed. He was grown older and younger at once, she thought; and very kindly he looked down at her distress.

"Michael," she said, stealing one step nearer again; "I remember you saying that you were going to tell all, and give yourself up. Are you going to do that or what?"

"Well indeed, Sheila," he answered in a tone of apology, "I did the best I could: I went to the magistrate and told him the whole story; and he said it was no matter at all and a very good job, and to say no more about it. And he has been a very good friend to me since."

"Saints above!" cried Sheila.

"But mind, Sheila, now," he went on earnestly, taking yet a step nearer. "I am not saying that it was not a sin. God alone knows the black passion that was in my heart. And let me tell you

this, it was a very good thing that you ran from me, for I was on a bad road and not fit to have the care of you. But now, with God's help, I will do better, Sheila: and I am ready to wait for your forgiveness if it is till our heads are grey."

Sheila turned away with a sob: he took yet a step nearer, and catching up the corner of her mantle kissed it again and again.

Sheila drew it away from him and, with a fluttering sigh, ran past him, and swiftly up the white path to her cottage.

In a moment the sound of the shutting door reached Michael's ears, and a great agony fell upon him. His passion rose and tore him: it was as though his soul had been plucked from his body and his flesh was torn. All that night of enchanted moonlight he ran upon the hills, raging like some wild creature whose mate has been destroyed. Often as his feet led him down to Sheila's door, so often his better mind stayed his hand, even when it was upon the latch. It was not the unwilling wife he wanted, it was Sheila's very spirit that must bring her to his hand.

When, at the end of her appointed journey, the moon sank away at the earth's rim, Michael had once more got the bridle upon the violence in his nature and went down soberly to his bed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

It was some days later, while the snow yet lay, that upon a cold windy day a message came for Sheila from Nora O'Hea at her new home. It was brought by a fine lad of twelve years, riding an ass. Nora O'Hea was very ill or dying, he said, and wanted to see Sheila McBride directly.

Sheila put on her black dress and her red cloak and started away at once. She wished to take Magra with her, but the boy said the dogs of Upper Grange were savage, and would make a meal of him, so she sent him down to Tallat and he was glad enough to go. It was a long road, so she took turns with the boy in riding the ass—a fine animal, almost black in colour, with the memorial cross strongly marked upon his back. It was well cared for, and went fast at a word from the boy that brought it. It belonged to his brother Thomas Shandley, he said, who had it of Mrs. O'Hea, and who set a great value on it.

Riding and walking, it took them two hours to get to Upper Grange, an ancient country mansion

of grey stone, built on a hill, with offices and outbuildings that rambled down the slope. The boy led the ass in at the gate of the front avenue. On each side stood a row of brown beeches, their beautiful tapering branches heavily tossed by the wind. Between them stretched away to the house a fair path of untrodden snow.

"Mr. Mylotte has been away a week," said the boy. "Indeed he hasn't been much at home since Mick-a-Dandy was buried. And they get no visitors, as ye may tell for yourself."

The sky was very grey above the old grey house, and the white of the snow looked the whiter for the greyness. Sheila drew her red cloak closer about her as she rode, and her cheek was flushed with nervousness.

"Is it quite sure you are, Patrick, that it was Nora herself sent for me, and no mistake?"

"No mistake at all," answered the lad. "I'm takin' ye up to the front door that the dogs may be thinkin' you're quality. They have no respect for the poor, and I'm only afraid they won't be took in; for God knows a quality dog despises an ass."

"Well, but," she asked, as she came near the house, "is there nobody there to call them off?"

"There's no one but the ould dodderin' man and woman, and they wouldn't care if you were to be eaten. But I'm thinkin' if the front door is open, ye can slip in, an' up the stairs; that's her windows, them there to the left at the top; ye'll aisy find the room. Time and again my sister has

been up to see her, for there's no one to do a hand's turn for her, and the old people are that nasty, they won't have anybody to come to the house: Mr. Mylotte's orders, they say. Now," he went on, as Sheila got down at the steps. "Don't be feared, Sheila McBride, but run in and straight up the stair as quiet as a mouse."

Sheila was naturally brave, but her nerves had been weakened by her illness, and she trembled as she pushed the door, opened it a little way and stepped into the hall. There was no sound of human life in the house, but to Sheila's ears it was full of the rumbling of the wind.

An early dusk seemed to have fallen, except where a pale light crossed in shafts from the narrow windows that were deep-set in the wall. Upon everything lay the dust of months; as Sheila trod, it was cast upwards and the bars of whitish light that hung upon the stairs became thick and troubled at her passage.

Once at the top of the stairs, she stood still: she heard a gust of wind go lumbering in the distant chimneys and wandering blasts pass up and down, shutting doors that were out of sight and opening them again.

Sheila turned softly along the passage, as she had been told, and stole into the first room that opened off her left. It was empty save for some furniture that was heaped in the middle of the floor under a white sheet. A pane of glass was broken and the snow had drifted through. Was

there nothing in the house but the wind and the snow, and the ancient dust?

Sheila came out again and stood in the passage, to listen. A door clapped near her and a gust sank away. Then Sheila heard a separate sound that till now had confused itself with the noise of the wind. It was a low moaning or sighing, very faint; now dying away, now recommencing. Sheila stepped on a little farther and bent her head to listen. It was surely a human voice, and came from behind a closed door. Sheila went to the door and tapped upon it and called "*Nora!*" and the sighing ceased.

She pushed the door open and found herself in a large room, at one end of which was a bed with four posts hung in white. Sheila went uncertainly over and then started back in horror.

It was like the shadow of the old Nora that lay there. Her face was white as the snow outside; her black hair, as black as jet, strayed in long locks on the pillow and hung down from the bed.

She smiled faintly, but Sheila's hands were clasped in terror, for over all the bed was a dreadful colour of red.

"Sheila," whispered the sick girl, "it's very kind you are to come. I'm better to-day, but tired to my very heart. You never thought to come to visit me in such a grand house, did ye? Ah, but it's been the bitter poor house to me."

Sheila went a step nearer to the bed and took up the lifeless hand; it was cold as though the

frost were in it: she stooped and kissed the glassy cheek: it was as cold as snow. Nothing living was left of Nora save the faintly whispering voice.

"Sheila," she went on; "I've been thinkin' of the fair day at Gurt. If I was unkind, I ask your pardon; but I was in grand company, you see."

"Nora dear," said Sheila, "say no more of it, and you lying there; ah, Mother of Mercy, what will I do? Will I light a fire, Nora dear, and change the bed, and make somethin' hot to warm you? Tell me, poor Nora, will I get a doctor to you, or what?"

A tremor of nervousness disturbed the cold face:

"Whisht, Sheila!" she said weakly, with pauses between. "Mrs. Mulloy is very cross; it's Mr. Mylotte's orders for me to see no one that's common, not to be disgracin' his house with low company. And he's against doctors, Sheila, and thinks one woman ought to do for another. And Mrs. Mulloy minds me; morning and evening she gives me all I want, and she would scold me if she found any differ in the room, and she would tell all to him. And he's a hard man, Sheila. I must wait upon him, hand and foot, when he's here; but he's mostly away with his grand friends. Oh, he's a very hard man. I can't speak to please him, or eat to please him, or even sit upon a chair to please him. But then the gentry are not like the common people, far grander and all. Is there any food there, Sheila?"

"Bread and butter and milk there is, Nora."

"Give me a drink if you can," she whispered, "and put some food in my hand, and maybe I can eat it when I've been to sleep."

Sheila did it for her, and then kissed her again.

"There's a good girl you are!" whispered Nora. "I am goin' to sleep, Sheila. I've been very ill, but now I'm out of pain. But run you, for Mrs. Mulloy is a terrible woman when she's put out. Good-bye to ye, Sheila, and God reward you for comin'."

The thin whispering ceased, and Nora suddenly slept; the piece of bread in her hand fell to the floor, and the low sighing moan came again from her lips. Sheila looked round the desolate room: there were a few dead ashes in the grate and the wind rumbled in the chimney. There was nothing she could do. Nora was dying fast, but she could not see herself and felt no terror at her state: it would be no kindness to wake her from her dreams to her fear of Mrs. Mulloy.

So Sheila knelt and said a prayer for her, all she could do; then rose and, gathering up the long locks of rough curling hair, laid them straight down either side of the still figure.

Then trembling, and herself almost as white, she stole from the room and along the wide passage where the winds went sighing up and down, like the ghosts of the sinners who had lived there come back to witness the new master's sins.

Sheila reached the house-door in safety, then,

looking about and seeing no one, and hearing no sound, ran swiftly down the white avenue to the gate where her guide waited, fear snatching at her skirts as she ran.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE AWAKENING

It was dark when Sheila, weary and heart-sick, walked up the mountain path to her cabin. To her surprise, a bright light shone at the window-pane, and Magra bounded out of the darkness, almost throwing her over in the excess of his joy.

Sheila looked eagerly about, but she saw no one and heard no sound: only through the darkness she felt a presence watching her.

She almost called aloud, but then thought better of it, and at last moved on to her own door. When she opened it, a little heaven of rest and comfort seemed spread before her eyes. The presence she had suspected had been busy within; the floor was newly swept and the shapely pyramid of blazing turves upon the hearth lit far corners with waving rays of yellow light. Upon every poorest object in the cottage the finger of love had been laid; under the magic of that touch the little cabin smiled a paradise, its humbleness charmed away.

Sheila clasped her hands for joy at the brightness: never since her mother's death had home-coming for her worn such a look. And here was

more than her mother could do, for on the little table, set ready by the elbow chair, there shone a splendid scarlet blossom, like the flower and delight of love itself. The rays of the fire struck upon it and it seemed to send forth a living glow of crimson.

In spite of her weariness Sheila hung about it, wondering at its beauty: she thought of the great house from which she had just fled, with its half-divined secret like a foul mind that looks out from behind a handsome face. And here was her own poor home, a mere speck upon the mountain, but whose heart was the secret and pure fire of love.

It was with a strange mingling of emotions that Sheila came back from the little room within to eat her supper by the hearth. She had changed her dress, and now sat down on her low stool by the fire with her supper of bread and milk on her knee. After her long journey by snowy fields and lanes, she took great delight in the warmth and shelter, in the colour of the blaze and the gleam of the wonderful flower that Michael had left her for company. By her lay Magra, his noble head resting on his paws, the firelight glancing on the white and gold of his coat.

But when she had eaten and was rested, she began to be heavy and sad; and at last she was constrained to look into her heart and examine its trouble. She hid her face in her hands, and wept as she thought of the windy house and the cold, cold girl upon the bed. But when she had wept

for Nora, there was still a trouble remaining, like a pricking thorn in her heart.

For a long time she could not tell what it was, but at last she made it out, and then, with a shivering sigh, she rose and, with her hands clasped together, walked up and down the cottage.

This, then, she thought, could be a woman's lot, if a man did but will it so. Nora had no more power in the hands of her husband than a foolish bird caught in a cruel boy's hand. She thought of other wretched women she had seen, the wives of bad husbands, and her pride suffered in the recollection of their helplessness. The pang that she felt was that which agitates the bosom of the slave when he sees his fellow tortured under the rod. It was very bitter to her.

She had heard them say, the old women, nodding their heads together, that love lasted no longer than the first loving time, and that after that a woman was worse off than a servant that goes unpaid.

Sheila went and stood by the hearth, her feet firmly planted, her hands wrung together, and her lips closed. Never, she thought, so long as she lived would she submit herself to such a tyranny; standing there, she reared up her head like an untrained colt that starts from the bridle.

But even while she stood there, full of insurrection, a sudden powerful longing took hold of her, the like of which she had never felt before. Her heart leaped with a strange throbbing, her lips

opened, and she half held out her arms to the blaze: before her eyes was a distinct vision of Michael's face, dark and troubled, with sweat upon the brow, and his brown eyes looking straight into hers. From them beckoned a strange invitation, loneliness calling to loneliness across a gulf that only a pure love may cross.

Sheila's heart melted, and her spirit shook and bowed itself to accept the law it had been in the act to refuse. Love itself, through Michael's eyes, was calling to her—the love that will laugh at weariness and bodily pains, that will patiently endure even the soil of sin, that can transcend distance, and bear up under the heavy weight of the years.

So it happened to Sheila that, in the moment when she had first apprehended the secret sorrow of womanhood, her awakened feeling was stirred to an apprehension of its secret joy.

She was like a creature transfigured as she stood by the fire. Her face was pale, but a strange smile shone over it, and tears stood in her large clear eyes. She had forgotten herself.

Poor Michael, she thought; the world had been a cold place for him. He had offended, but it was she herself who was the cause of his offence. And how sad he had been, and how lonely, and how kind! She would do anything he asked—anything, anything; and that the years might hold no sorrow for him like that which was by. She would leave her little house and her bees, and her wild

garden on the hill, and the clear streams of air that changed morning and night, and the well with its honey-sweet water, and she would go down to that sad house with its terrible buried sin, and share in his repentance.

Long and long she stood in an ecstasy of self-forgetfulness; and when at last she went to her bed, she was happy beyond expression, and her dreams were all of the Spring.

CHAPTER XL

THAW

It was after this night that Sheila, long silent, began to sing once more. Her voice was fuller and more speaking than it had been; it had now the different grace of the woman's voice, and had lost the round passionless note of her early youth that sang like a flute, missing the heart.

It became her delight in the evening to sit by the fire, sometimes with her fiddle, sometimes without, trying over the songs she knew.

Thus she cheered away her loneliness like a bird that sits in the dark, with the rain upon its feathers, and sings, certain of the dawn.

Her favourite song at that time was "The Little Heathy Hill," and the words and dancing music of it were often floated down to Michael on the wind, as he listened some way below:

"How sweet the air of the morning fair that brings in the month of May,
As I stand and look about me on my little heathy hill,
While the white sun of summer is warming the corn-blades,
And on the tree the green leaf of the sunlight has his fill;
While down below the wild ducks go, and after them the mallard;

And by the mare the bay colt runs, and babe and mother play;
And in the stream the bright trout swim, and fairly leaps the salmon!
Oh, sure the sick man long abed shall be rising up this day."

As the young year turned itself day by day in the expectation of its comeliness, they each became the more absorbed in their thought of each other.

Love transfigured Sheila to Michael and Michael to Sheila, till the distant presence of each became the only centre of the other's days. The current of Michael's thoughts and longings that ascended to Sheila's cottage met and passed the current of her dreaming, that now set always downward to the distant house-roofs among the bare trees of Tallat.

Michael's silent wooing continued day by day. With the most jealous care he watched the little cottage that stood so lonely among the constant snows that fell more heavily upon the hills during the first weeks of February. Sheila would lie upon her bed at night, her heart beating as she heard footsteps about her house and saw the gleam of a lantern at the window as Michael shovelled the snow from her door. She never sought him, or spoke to him, although sometimes she would rise from her bed and peer through the narrow pane till she could catch a climpse of his tall figure crossing by the door.

Though she would go down to Tallat when he

asked her, she thought, she was not going to ask herself.

In the last week in February a sudden thaw-wind set in from the southwest; a soft rain fell in continual showers, and the snow was dissolved almost in a night and came down from the hills in flood. Sheila flung wide her cottage door and stood upon the door-stone to hear the countless voices of the rushing streams that poured downwards towards the roar of the river that called them from below. Over the whole earth there seemed to be a hurry and an awakening.

Crows and jackdaws wheeled and flew below, raising a continual cawing and chattering, and the sweet wind blew with a soft sound.

Sheila looked about and all around, and there was Michael climbing the hill, not slowly, but leaping upwards in bounds as though running a race. A trembling emotion seized upon her; she flushed and drew back, and then stood forward again. What could he want, and why was he coming at such a pace?

In a moment he was before her, panting with the haste he had made, his face pale and his eyes gleaming.

He took her by the hand and "Come, Sheila!" he said. "You must come down to Tallat with me. The river is in flood, and you must come down and see what has happened there yourself."

Set alight by his excitement, Sheila went within and caught up her red cloak, and then, taking the

hand that he held out for her, ran with him down the hill path.

"I will not take you through Tallat, Sheila," he said, "because you might not wish it; so we will go a way round that I may bring you to the place I want you to see."

All the way down the loud noise of the flood below accompanied them, and often they had to jump the streams that crossed their path, hurrying, like them, to the river.

It was a long round they had to make before they got down; below, brooks were grown into rivers, and hard to cross, but they never cared for wetting their feet.

As they went on in silence and the noise of the river grew loud in their ears, Michael grasped Sheila's hand more firmly, and she trembled, she knew not why.

At last, breaking through a leafless underwood, the river lay before them. Many a winter Sheila had seen it in flood, but never so strangely broad as this.

It was now a great tumbling stretch of dark brown water, more quiet further out, but below their feet turbid and tumultuous, spotted with foam, brown and white, that whirled upon the water and clung to the bank.

Slowly Sheila began to recognise the place, and she knew at last where Michael had brought her here, and why. Her hands were resting on the old ruined wall, at the very spot where she had

stood with Mick-a-Dandy; below her, where the ranks of nettles had flourished, the river now boiled and ran, following the course of the old wall.

"Do you see, Sheila," said Michael, speaking loud, so as to be heard above the noise of the stream, "what has happened in the night? The current of the river has turned again as it did fifty years ago. It has left the bank beyond, and look how the earth is broken away under the wall. Sheila, by this *he* is gone out to sea."

Sheila stood and wept.

"Michael," she said, "when the water goes down, will the place be covered?"

"Ay," said Michael, "till the river changes its course again. Gunyon can remember such another flood fifty years ago. It is the mercy of God the water has come down, Sheila. No matter what I was doing, on my bed at night or at work in the day, I saw this place; and it was as if a black wind came up from it into the house; I could get no comfort in the place for thinking of it, for my sin was written out here upon the earth. Now it is swept clean away, thanks be to Him."

Sheila was still weeping.

"But it is all written yet upon our hearts, Michael. Never, never can I forget."

"We will not forget, then, Sheila," he said. "But look up on the bank above: there is old Gunyon come out to see it."

Sheila looked up. Through the underwood she could see the old man standing with bare head and

thin grey locks, his clasped hands raised to heaven as he prayed and wept and gave thanks all at once.

"Oh, Michael!" said Sheila. "Poor Mick-a-Dandy! if only he could have seen this day!"

"Ay," said Michael, sighing sadly. "That is the worst now. He should never have been made a party to it. His mind was not strong to bear the thought of it after."

"Look, Michael," said Sheila. "Gunyon sees us now."

"He is beckoning to you, Sheila," said Michael, flushing red. "He wants you to go into the house. And will you go, Sheila?"

"No indeed," said she, in a sudden hurry of fear. "I will just go back by myself. I have promised to spin pounds and pounds of wool for Theresa, who is getting old and cannot spin so fast."

With a smile and a wave of the hand to Gunyon, she turned and ran through the bushes.

Michael came after her. "I will come with you, then, Sheila," he said gravely, "for the brooks are bad to cross.

Sheila relented in her heart, but her pride would not let her speak. But she smiled up at him kindly, and took the hand he held out to help her.

"Oh, Michael!" she cried in sudden delight, "it is the spring! I can smell flowers in the wind! Oh, I am glad in my heart that the winter is gone!"

As they went on, the strangeness that had been between them melted away. Like familiar friends

they walked hand in hand, and Michael looked on Sheila with delight, and Sheila on Michael.

Slowly they went along the wet slopes on their way back to Sheila's hill. In their hearts was the secret promise of spring, and all around them the thaw-wind blew; over their heads it rocked the bare branches of the trees that were laden with buds born, like their love, of the sweetness of last year's summer, and safely nursed the winter long.

CHAPTER XLI

HOME-COMING

SPRING, that had seemed so long in coming, came quickly at the last.

Warm winds blew from the south, and up from the south came great spreading waves of green. At first it was only the low-lying pastures and sheltered hollows that stayed them; then wave upon wave overflowed, till the face of the earth, as far as Sheila's eye could see, was of a fresh and lively emerald.

The sun was warm and the skies open and clear. and the sweetness of the air seemed to breathe rejoicing.

Michael and Sheila often met together: wherever Sheila's feet took her, Michael was sure to be there; and it was hard for Michael to come out of the house but what he saw Sheila watching for him far away on the hill.

Still he found her hard indeed to manage. As the sun grew brighter and all the colours of spring became day by day gayer, so did she.

The look of ecstatic innocence returned to her face, and her eyes shone behind their misty veil, till

Michael's heart was ravished by their vexing brilliance.

Every trick and wile that a maiden can use she put upon Michael. She was like the fleeting spirit of the hills, changing and radiant, always alluring, and never to be caught.

Her life was full of delight to her; she was free and gay and wanted no more than she had; so healthful was she that merely to run with the wind, barefooted, on the hill paths was an ecstasy. And there was Michael, her beloved friend, to be father and mother, and playmate and servant to her, all in one. So day by day she put away her surrender, avoiding in her mind the big house and the memory of her fear.

But with Michael it was far otherwise. The empty rooms of Tallat, with their desolate echoes, called for Sheila; his nights were restless: he could not sleep for want of her, and for fear that some misfortune might visit the tiny cottage on the hill and pluck his treasure for him.

His mind was full of plans for the future, and he was unceasing in pursuit of the knowledge that was coming to him so late. For all these reasons he wanted Sheila by his side for comfort and for help.

At length, after long patience, he gave orders for the house of Tallat to be turned out of window and to be made fresh and clean; for he knew Sheila's love of all that was wholesome and sweet. And at last he bade a feast to be got ready. He

would lure his shy bird to her cage, he thought, and once in he would shut the door.

It was one beautiful evening early in April that he stood upon the hill and bade Sheila good night by her own door.

"To-morrow," he said, "you will come down by the river in the afternoon, Sheila, and I will be there. And I will not have you wear a black dress any more. Put on a white dress to-morrow, Sheila, in honour of the spring."

And "Very well, Michael," said Sheila shyly.

"Good night to you," said Michael in delight, and turning her about he kissed her on the lips. Sheila escaped from him and ran to her cottage and shut the door. With strange feelings she got out the white dress, once worn, then put away for so long.

Sheila could have had no notion what Michael was about, yet she was a long while next morning making herself neat. She was as busy in her cottage as a bird over its bathing in a river pool, and in the afternoon it was a beautiful young Sheila that came out upon the path and stood for a moment looking within before she locked the door.

Slowly she descended the slope of the hill, and, coming to the river, sat down upon a stone with a beating heart. She had a while to wait, and so lovely was the place that her anxiety was calmed. The river was full and clear, and coloured of woven greens and blues. Over it arched the branches of the trees, adorned with small fluttering leaves of

young green. Above the leaves danced, and below the clear water was threaded with flying golden circles.

The birds who loved to build in the sheltered bushes had begun all together their afternoon song. From where she sat Sheila could see a thrush with spotted breast, who was singing loudest of all. She watched its round panting breast and throbbing throat and the tiny head turned skyward in its joy, till her uneasy fears were charmed away.

When at last she heard Michael's footsteps she stood quickly up: he was coming at a great pace, and when he broke through the bushes Sheila saw he was in the very same suit of grey he had worn once, and only once, before. In a flash she remembered how he had looked the first day she had seen him in his fustian clothes with a stooped head and a look of long endurance on his face.

Now to her eyes his face was shining as bright as the day, and he bore himself erect and comely.

He came straight to her. "Ah, Sheila!" he said. "Blessings on the day. That is where I wished to see you, and indeed you are looking like a queen."

He took her hands and gazed into her eyes. They were like two wide sunny pools and a star in each.

"Oh, Sheila," he said, "all day and all night I dream of you, and when I find you at last you are more beautiful than my dream."

"I am not near so handsome as you, Michael," said Sheila, blushing. "You are a very fine man indeed."

Michael laughed and kissed her, and putting an arm about her said,

"Come, now: the day is bright yet, and we will go for a walk."

Sheila gathered her skirts in one hand and began to talk, as they went along, to hide her shyness.

"Do you know," she said, "Mick-a-Dandy's dog came again to me last night. I found him sitting by the door, and thinner than ever. He is nothing but bones and yellow skin. He will never come near the place, only when Magra is down with you at Tallat. And he sits staring at me, and the water pours out of his eyes. And if you'll believe me, Michael, he has the very look of Mick-a-Dandy himself."

"Do ye tell me that?" said Michael, listening to her and looking down at her the while.

"And," she said, speaking lower, "this is a queer thing, now: Theresa is telling me that there's two little children down by the bog has come on Mick-a-Dandy washing his old red coat in the water, and the little children say he has been talking to them quite friendly. And I'll tell you another thing, Michael: not a morsel will the dog eat as he sits by the fire with me, but what I give him in his mouth to carry away, that he takes, and runs like the wind with it up the mountain. I couldn't help thinking, Michael, maybe he had Mick-a-

Dandy hid somewhere, and he was feeding him. Else what reason has the creature to be so thin?"

"Those are queer tales, Sheila," said Michael. "But though it's sure the little children see what we don't see, still you must remember they're great at inventions. And Mick-a-Dandy is dead, sure enough, my dear, more's the pity; for I saw him in his coffin after they had made him ready for the grave: his eyes were shut, and all the foolishness was gone from his face. He was greatly changed, Sheila; he looked to have more wisdom than any living man: it was a sight to see."

"I know," she said, "for Father O'Brien said the same thing when he came up the hill one day."

"You and he are great friends now," said Michael.

"Indeed and we are," said Sheila. "I could never tell you how kind he has been: not like himself at all."

Michael laughed at her. "He scolded you well, once," said he.

They were still talking earnestly together when Sheila noticed the sky growing dark.

"Look, Michael, what a heavy cloud!" she cried.

"Yes, indeed! it will be down in a minute," said he. "Come, Sheila, you must run now. I know of a good place for shelter near by."

He caught her by the hand, and, laughing, she ran with him by the side of the river, along the rough uneven path.

"But where is the shelter, Michael?" she said presently. "I will be tired of running in this long dress."

"Just a bit further," said he. "Make haste, Sheila; here is the rain."

Sheila ran obediently, and Michael laughed to himself as he helped her over the rough places.

At last, suddenly turning from the river, he hurried her through a hedge and up a slope of meadow-grass. The rain was falling in heavy drops, when Sheila, breathless from running, reached the top of the slope, and saw before her the house of Tallat she had left half a year ago.

She was seized with a nervous tremor. "Oh, Michael, Michael! where have you brought me?" she said, and clung to his arm.

"Quick, Sheila," he said, encouraging her; "look at the rain falling: you will be drenched." And he hurried her over the meadow and through the wicket gate and over the gravel to the front door.

In a moment Sheila stood in the hall, while the rain poured outside, and Michael laughed to see her white figure making sunlight in the place for him.

"Now," said he, "that is where I have dreamed to see you stand. Take off your hat, Sheila, that I may see the shining of your hair."

Sheila did so; then Michael came to her and laid one finger under her round chin and studied over her sweet young face. Then he folded her in his

arms and, laying down his head upon hers, broke into a sudden sobbing.

"Hush, Michael, hush," said Sheila. "See, now, I will comfort you." And turning, she drew down his dark head and kissed his cheek.

"Do I seem foolish to you, Sheila?" he asked. "I have suffered so sore in this house: misery upon misery, each worse than the last. Blows and curses and humiliations and ignorance of the mind. And last of all, my dear, the anger of the Lord, which is hard for any man to bear. And I laid myself upon his will, Sheila; and I made sure he would take you from me in a just punishment for my sin; I was eaten up with the fear of it. Even now I can scarce believe my joy."

"I will comfort you, Michael," said Sheila ardently. "I will be father and mother to you, and no sorrow shall ever come to you when I can stand in the way. Nothing shall hurt you any more but what the Almighty shall lay upon us both."

Michael laughed in his delight and called her many sweet names: darling, secret love, and joy of his heart.

And he told her her face was like a white rose, and her hair was a net spread to catch his heart, and her voice was the key of it, and her hands were like meadow-flowers, and her throat was like a dove's—till Sheila blushed and chid him for his overmuch praise.

And as they talked the storm outside passed: the clouds cleared away from the west, and the sun-

shine swept over the meadows like a beautiful bride.

At the sight of it Sheila grew suddenly wilful, she could not tell why; she went over to the great table and caught up her hat and tied it under her chin while Michael looked on.

She walked quietly to the door and, turning, said:

"It is a beautiful evening, Michael; thank you kindly for the shelter for the rain, and now I will be going home while it is fine."

Michael stood amazed; then as she turned to leave the door he was seized with sudden anger.

"No, wild girl!" he said loudly. "Not a foot from that door shall you go!"

He was suddenly checked, for Sheila flew across the hall and into his arms.

"Mary, have pity! And will you be cross with me?" she said. "Sure, I didn't mean it. It was only play. There is no need for you to put on a black face with me, ever. I will do all that you tell me, Michael." And the tears stood in her eyes.

"Indeed I ask your pardon, Sheila," said Michael kindly, "but I thought you were going to run from me again, and I could not have borne it."

"I will not run from you any more," said Sheila; and as she spoke the door opened and Gunyon came into the room and saw them standing together.

"Now the Lord be praised!" he said, and held

up his hands to heaven. "The young mistress is come home!"

* * * * * *

That evening the house of Tallat was lit in all its windows, and the young master and mistress were as children in the hands of old Gunyon, who set them forth as a show.

The great table was spread with a fair cloth and lit with many-branched silver candlesticks and decked with flowers, and a fine feast set out.

At the head sat Michael, with Sheila by his side in her white gown. Behind them hovered Gunyon in his best livery, lecturing, scolding, and praising them both in a loud whisper.

"You're doin' very well, Master Michael; take the knife round about, and raise the shoulder, clane. That's it, sir, that's it! the ould master couldn't 'a' done it better himself.... Hould up, Miss Sheila, dear; hold up your head for the love of heaven, and you'll look like a lady born." Then in stentorian tones, "Sherry or claret, ma'am?" Then in the loud whisper, "Say claret, Miss Sheila; it's more becoming a lady; and mind you never take but the one glass."

All the while there was a cautious creaking up and down the passage, and a succession of peering heads and stretched-out necks at the edge of the door. The news of the home-coming had been spread about, and the people of the country, having a natural delight in youth and beauty and the romance of love, were come to look on.

And here was more than the common interest. For the master who was now set above them had been all his life the daily companion of their labours, only more friendless and troubled than any one of them all.

They all knew, besides, that there had been some grave trouble in the house that had come between the young people; but their growing affection and respect for their young master inclined them not to be too curious in asking the cause; for one and all desired to see him in happiness at last.

When the table was cleared and its polished face spread exactly as it had been in John Power's time, Michael said,

"You've got some company there in the passage, Gunyon?"

"Well, sir, I hope you'll pardon it: it's just a small few that is here to wish your honour joy."

"Let them come in, Gunyon; let them come in and drink the mistress's health."

One by one they filed into the hall, men and women, the first-comers shamefacedly hanging back and pushing each other, but taking more and more confidence from the elbowings of those who came on behind.

When all were come in, the old shepherd stood out from among them and, turning his battered hat round and round in his fingers,

"We've made so bold," he said, "as to come in and wish your honour joy. For it does our hearts

good to see ye lookin' like ye do to-night, havin' known ye, so to say, since ye was a little felle in a waggoner."

"They would take it very kind if you would say a few words to them," whispered Gunyon.

On seeing them come in, Michael had risen up, and Sheila too; but he saw that she was pale and trembling, so turned her chair about, and made her sit upon it, and himself stood with his hands upon the back of it.

"I am obliged to you all," he said frankly and with a smile on his face, "for coming here to-night to wish me joy. And before you drink our health, I would like to say a word or two to you. You know very well that there has been an unhappy difference between your young mistress here and me; to-night I am proud to tell you that she was all along in the right of it, and that it was I who was deep in the wrong."

There was a little stir among them, and the women looked at each other.

"And now let me tell you," he went on, "that difference is the last and the only one there will ever be between us. But mind you, now, if ever there should be, I warn you all to take her part; for, as young as she is, and as simple, she is sure to be in the right."

The people laughed, and the women were delighted and whispered together; then Michael went on:

"There's very little use in talking; you know me

well enough by this time, and I'm glad to say I know you. But this much I will say: I mean to try and do my best for the place, and leave you all perhaps a bit better off than I found you. And one last word: I thank you all for the kindness with which you have received me as your master, for I was never bred for it, as you know. And before we part I would be glad if you would drink a glass to the memory of my father, John Power, for I don't believe there's one of us here to-night that doesn't miss him in his heart."

They broke out into cheers and clappings that were renewed again and again, and the finest clapping of all came from behind Sheila's chair, where stood Father O'Brien, who had come in a moment before, unperceived.

Then Gunyon, who was in great glory, filled the glasses, and the toasts went round. They drank to the "old master" and "Master Michael" and "the young mistress," and they cried out "God bless them!" and "God send they may see their children and their children's children in this house!"

Tears were on the cheeks of some as they came forward one by one and kissed his hand; and loudest of all in blessing was a tall gaunt woman, who held a little dancing gold-haired girl by the hand.

At length Gunyon shepherded them all out of the hall, and through the glimmering dusk they all streamed away to their homes.

As the sweet spring night drew its perfumed curtains round about the horizon, the spangled stars came out and made the heavens gay.

Sheila's cottage stood dark and empty on the hill, its hearth-fire gone out, not to be lit again, and you would have said the hillside mourned for the free maid who had been a brightness there.

Down below peace and silence settled down over the house of Tallat. Not a sound was to be heard as one by one the lights in its windows suddenly went out.

But within its walls the secret fire of love had been kindled, that was to be a warmth and brightness through it for many a long year. Its rooms were no more to give back desolate echoes, for they were to be inhabited by Sheila's voice. The twilight was no longer to summon those troops of melancholy shadows, for Sheila's presence was to be everywhere, going up and down.

Like the brown brier the poet writes of, Michael Power's life had frowned the bitter winter through; but now, after many days, it had blossomed, and bore the rose upon its top.

CHAPTER XLII

CONCLUSION

MUCH there is that might still be told of Michael and Sheila. Their lot had fallen in stormy days and a troubled land, and their path was often a hard one to follow. But, in spite of difficulties, it is certain that the love between them grew and waxed greater, till it became a strong shield to them and to their house.

But it is certain, too, that sadness was often mixed with their joy, for no repentance can absolve the memory. At times there seemed still to be a shadow hanging over the house and the meadows of Tallat, and they went more soberly because of it.

As the next year came about, the woman's lot fulfilled itself in Sheila: life brought her a new joy, in which trouble was so closely mixed that when she smiled she felt sad, and she was happy when she wept. And in time she held a young babe upon her knees, and learned a new wisdom as she pondered its sleeping face.

It was a blue-eyed child, of a very blissful nature;

as it lay by itself it was constantly smiling—wide heavenly smiles, as though at some mystery of angels that no one else could see.

The first day that it found strength to totter across the gravel, and sit bright-headed as a daisy in the grass, Michael and Sheila's joy was great.

Hand in hand they followed the child and watched it as it constantly laughed and babbled to itself and plucked at the flowers.

It was as if the joy and tenderness of their love had suddenly taken shape before their eyes, perfect in innocence and delight; the dark past did not exist for it, and as it ran in its happiness, it looked to them like a sunbeam chasing the last shadow away. The evil that had been, had run the appointed circle's round, and come exhausted to the end of its course, and now the new circle of joy had begun.

That first day, Michael lay down at his ease along the summer grass, looking now at Sheila and now at the child.

"Did you ever see such happiness?" he said, for the child laughed aloud as a wild bee came by. "Sheila, he has your eyes and your smile."

"But look at his forehead, Michael: it is yours, and his curly hair. And I can see he is full of thoughts."

"I believe he is," said Michael. "See him trying to lay hold of the wind! Sheila, remember that he does not know! Shall we ever tell him?"

"Never," said Sheila. "We have no right to

spoil the world for him. Everything is beautiful to him here, and it is happy so."

As each day they looked through the eyes of innocence, Tallat slowly became for them an enchanted place. His ecstasy became a purifying presence that banished all memory of the fear and sorrow that had been, and recreated for them a natural joy in the woods and the meadows.

Each day they felt at these happy seasons a greater delight while the festival of the summer was spread before their eyes.

The blue tent of the heaven seemed to show each day a more celestial embroidery of cloud. The wild birds with their singing voices and fluttering wings became to them as great a wonder as the angels. Every daisy that spangled the grass seemed as beautiful as a star; every buttercup, that with its fellows covered the meadows with a golden web, was a separate chalice for the sunlight, and all around them the summer green was like living emerald.

Thus love dealt kindly with Michael and Sheila, unfolding for them, one by one, its many secrets, and year by year making the earth more beautiful and the heavens more clear.

THE END.

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